

From:



To:

The Rag is a magazine produced by Revolutionary Anarcha-feminist Group (RAG), a publishing collective based in Dublin, Ireland. We are all feminists, united in our recognition that women's subordination exists and needs to be fought against. Our struggle needs to be fought alongside the struggle against other forms of oppression and not treated as an afterthought or a distraction. We are all anarchists united in our belief in the need to create a new society based on co-operation and mutual aid. We oppose the capitalist, patriarchal, racist society wherein the majority are exploited. We come together to create a publication to express the voice of women and trans\* people, to challenge the status quo and to collectively explore and celebrate the alternatives.

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ANARCHA FEMINIST MAGAZINE !!!





## Welcome to the long awaited issue 6 of The Rag Magazine!!

We have no amazing excuse for why it's taken us 3 years to get this issue together, but we have written a little something to show you all what we've been up to in The RAG Year(s) on page 2.

As you may or may not know, RAG is a Dublin-based anarcha-feminist collective. In this issue we tackle various topics such as sex education in Ireland, pregnancy, consent and sexual assault, race and identity, dealing with depression, travel adventures, abortion in Ireland, and high heeled shoes. This issue deals with a lot of triggering issues such as rape, depression, and eating disorders (articles starting on pages 19, 22, 26, and 31 so please pay attention to warnings when reading). We are very excited about this issue; it's full of good stuff we've been saving!

It's been an exciting time for feminism in Ireland. We've met loads of new amazing feminists and pro-choice activists. It's been a thrill to see the emergence of the Abortion Rights Campaign, a professional, cohesive and dedicated Island-wide campaign set up to be in it for the long haul. The Irish Feminist Network are another group of young feminists we've seen emerge over the last few years. We attended one of their conferences, and although we were disappointed with the lack of awareness of class issues and economic struggles for women, there was some interesting discussion around pro-choice issues and an attempt to link the different generations of feminists. In Dublin there have been some fun women-only hangouts known as the 'Ladies of Dublin Social Extravanzas' which have been great for getting to know like-minded women. A new group called 'The Queer Thing' have taken up organising amazing queer events based mostly out of Seomra Spraoi Social Centre. They wrote a fantastic zine we picked up at the Dublin Anarchist Bookfair back in March. One of the articles in it inspired us to have a long discussion about our 'women and female-identified' label and throw it out the window, so GO QUEER THING! Around the country other groups such as Feministas in Cork, Galway University Fem-Soc and Belfast Feminist Network have been raising awareness in their universities and their areas. Many of these, and other groups such as Galway Pro-Choice, have been actively campaigning with the Abortion Rights Campaign. The amazing women in Derry wrote a fab article about everything the Derry anarcha-feminists have been up for, but we took so long to produce this issue that it was all out of date. They are going to write us an updated version so keep your eyes on our blog <http://ragdublin.blogspot.ie/> and we'll have that up as soon as possible. In the world of the internet, exciting facebook groups have been bringing feminists together to plan the smashing of patriarchy and everything else needing to be smashed. Lastly the very exciting Festival For Choice is coming up on the 15th of November so we hope to see you all there!!

If you want copies of any of the other issues of The Rag, just send us an email to [ragdublin@gmail.com](mailto:ragdublin@gmail.com). Also please check out the now extinct issue #1 of our magazine which is available to download at <http://www.scribd.com/doc/175452677/The-Rag-Issue-one>

We really hope you enjoy this issue, Send us an email and let us know what you think!

Lots of Love,  
RAG

Huge thanks need to go out to many people, In no particular order: Seomra Spraoi, The Workers Solidarity Movement (sorry for stealing your office without asking!), Conor McCabe for doing a fascinating talk for us on Feminist Economics, Ursula Barry for agreeing to be interviewed for this issue, Anne Qy for organising the abortion Speak Out that lots of RAG members took part in, everyone involved in the Abortion Rights Campaign, Sarah Clarke and Julia in Derry and all the Derry Anarcha-feminists, Mark Grehan our amazing printer, Clare, Damo, and Stephie for last minute proof-reading, Sin é & Frank Ryans for hosting our fundraisers, Lee for giving us a much needed kick up the butt with their fantastic article kick up the butt, the bump for not turning into a baby until the magazine has been finished, and last but not least Michelle for her amazing artwork and the ever-fabulous Laura - LMNOP for her comic and cover! See more from Laura at <http://artbylmnop.blogspot.ie/>

# Contents

<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The Year(s) in RAG.....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>A Short History of Abortion in Ireland.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Abortion rights in Spain and Ireland: a continuous struggle by Leticia.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Choice Cuts, a comic by Lmnop.....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>RAG Interviews Ursula Barry: Activist, Scholar, Writer, Teacher.....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>The Politics of Pregnancy by Marianne.....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>How Do You Know When Someone Wants to Be Kissed? Advice on Consent by Sheila.....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>We're Telling, (trigger warning) by Suzanne.....</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>"Non-Consensual Sex?" (trigger warning) by Katie.....</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Fat and Bones: Life with an Eating Disorder (trigger warning) by Sinead .....</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>How I Beat Depression (trigger warning) by Angela.....</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>An Ambivalent Relationship with High Heels by Eve.....</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>Sexual Education in Ireland, commentary by Sheila.....</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>A Conversation About Parenting as an Anarcha-feminist by the RAG mothers.....</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>It's Just Hair, A Poem by Abi.....</b>	<b>41</b>
<b>My Wet Hot American Summer by KT.....</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>Queer As Book: Authors to Check Out by Eve.....</b>	<b>44</b>
<b>Where Are You From? Thoughts on Identity by Yemi.....</b>	<b>46</b>
<b>RAG Recommends.....</b>	<b>48</b>



In each issue of The Rag we have had a section called 'The Rag Year' to update fascinated readers on what we've been up to for the year in between publications. This time, calling it year is a bit fraudulent as it's actually been 3 years now since the last issue. We have no real excuses but that is how life goes. Members of RAG have moved away, moved back, suffered losses, started studying, gotten jobs. New people have joined with new ideas and the group has undergone so many changes. We are so proud to have come together to produce this issue at last and hope it will have been worth the wait.

So what have we been up to? Well, wait 'til you hear!

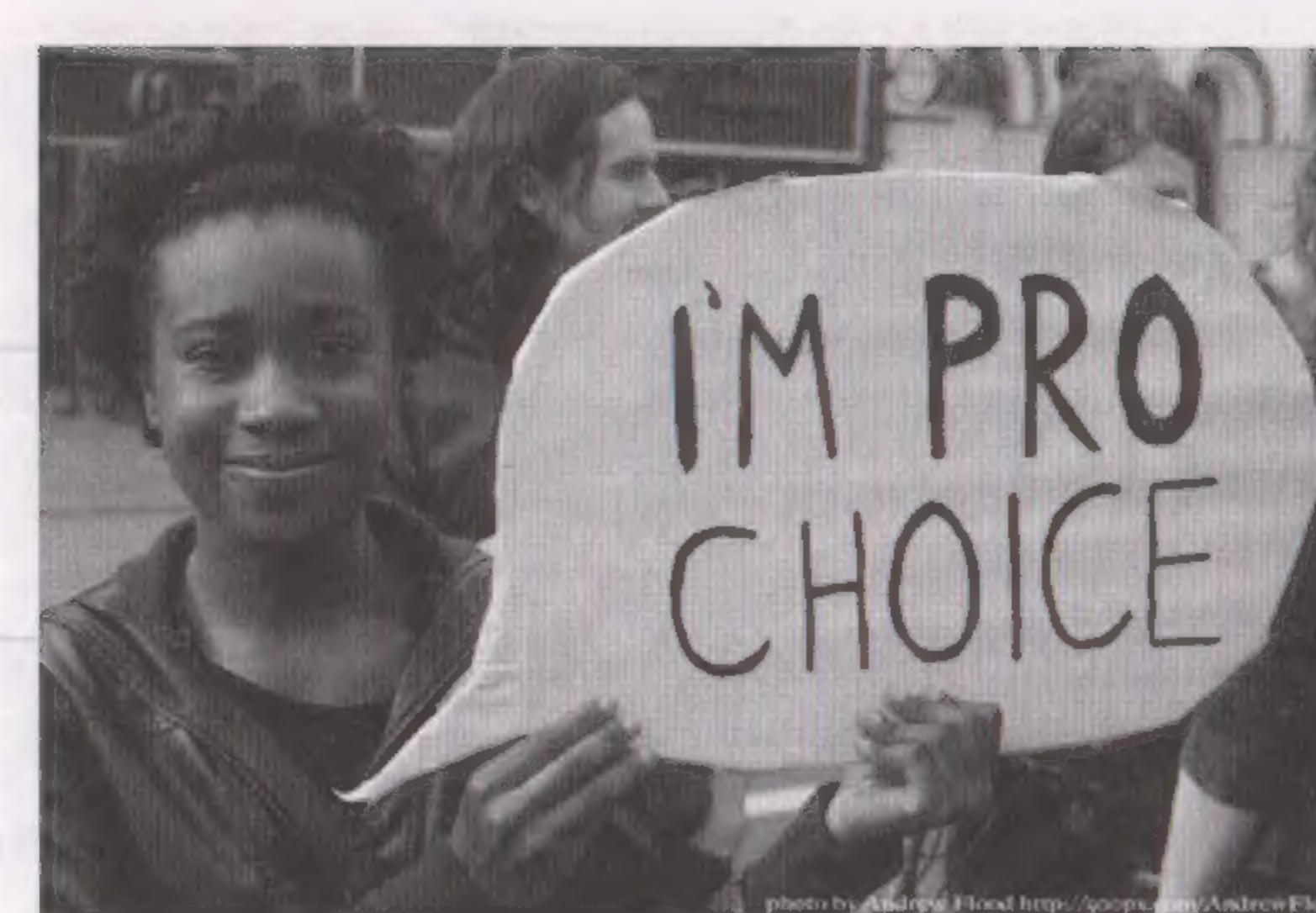
We organised some fundraisers: firstly a series of 'Awkward teenage diaries' events that were a laugh a minute, and then a night of traditional Irish music to fundraise for the Abortion Support Network.

RAG attended, took part in panels, and sold our merchandise at the Dublin Anarchist Bookfairs. We have been sorry to miss some London Bookfairs, but will make up for it this year! The most recent Anarchist Review features an interview with RAG veterans Clare and Angela by Leticia, a more recent addition to the group.

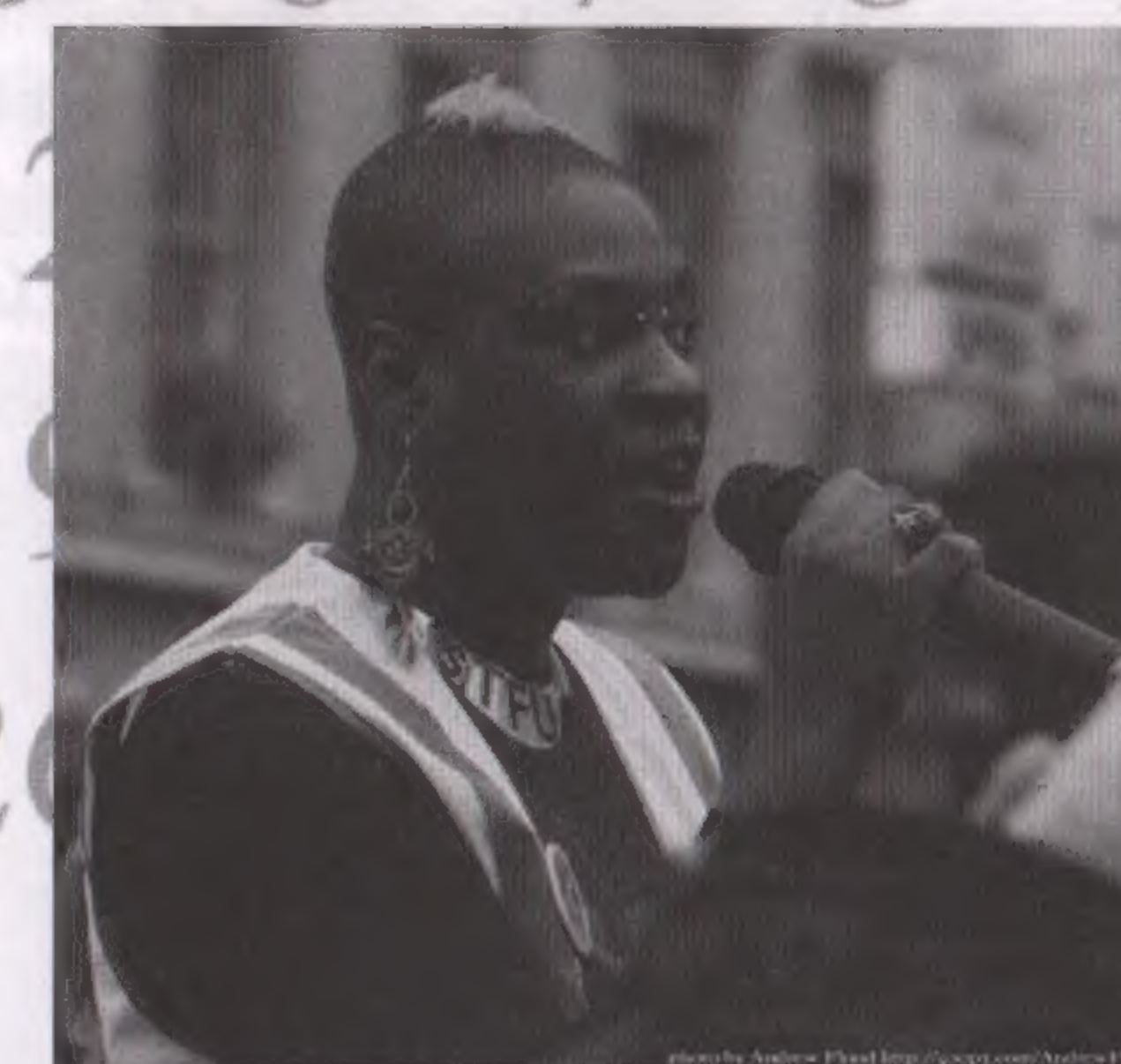
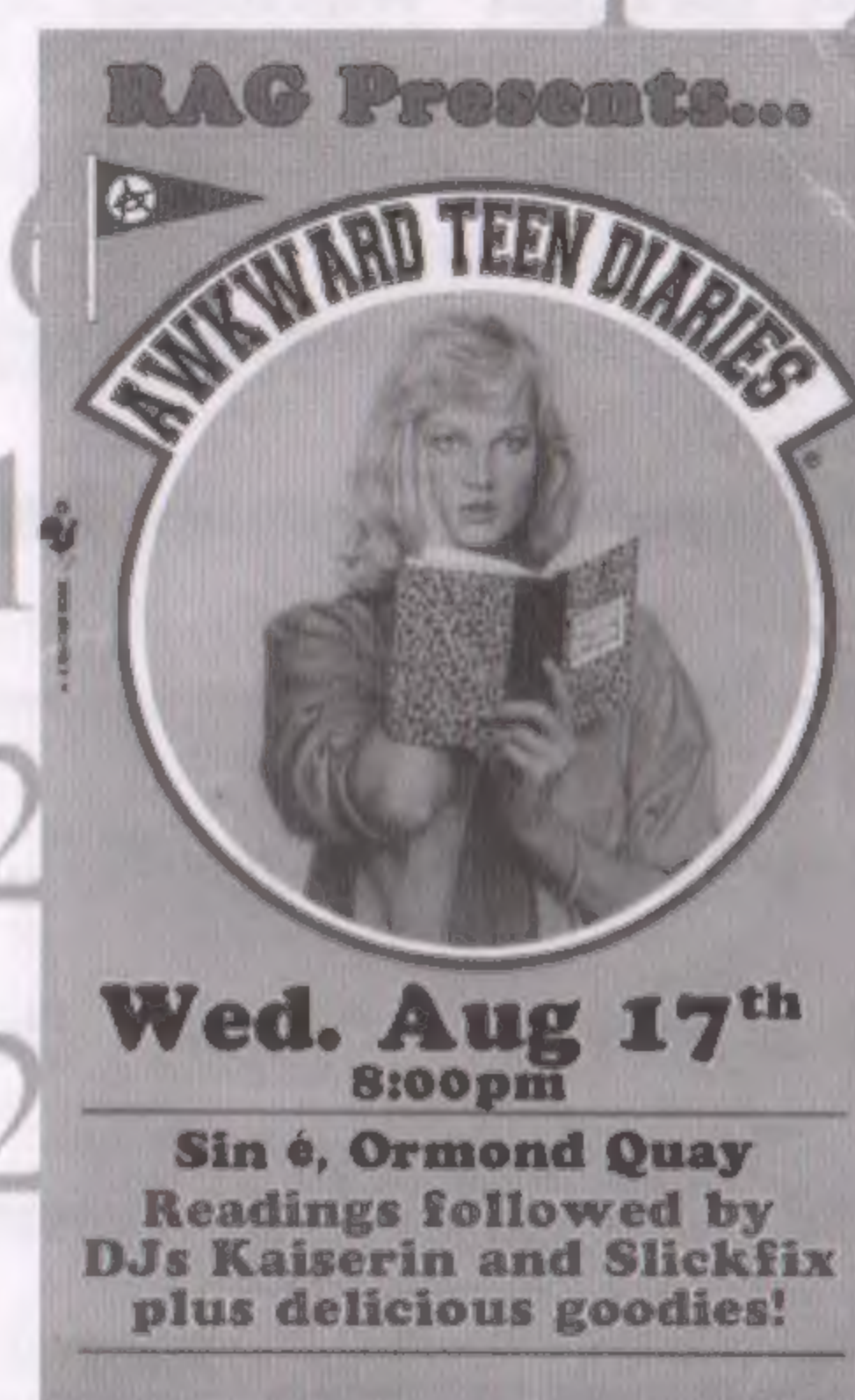
One of our proudest moments must have been seeing our article printed in the revised Dark Star Anarcha-feminist anthology, Quiet Rumours. We worked collaboratively on the article which is called 'Why Anarcha-Feminism?' and can also be found on our blog ([ragdublin.blogspot.ie](http://ragdublin.blogspot.ie)). Get out there and get a copy of the anthology because it rocks!

We recently revisited our policy on being a "women and female identified" only group. It was thanks to a kick up the ass from an amazing comrade that we took another look at our outdated and unfair policy. We had originally had a conversation at a meeting back in 2005ish and had never revisited the issue. After a long and interesting debate we came to the conclusion that the language and knowledge we had back then was out of date and we needed to pull up our socks. We discussed various membership policies including opening to cis-men but finally decided on 'women and trans\*' as the closest we could come to expressing what we want for RAG. We also realised that we need to keep re-visiting this and our other policies to ensure we keep having these conversations.

We have organised various talks and discussions over the last few years, both within the group and through open events. We had a few open meetings and found some amazing new members this way. One featured a



# The Year in RAG



discussion on how to deal with sexism and harassment in the workplace. Another addressed fear during the recession. We also hosted a talk about feminist economics, which we hope to develop further, and have had various discussions around consent and boundaries. RAG also took part in an Anti-Authoritarian assembly, which gathered together an array of activist groups that talked about how we can more fully support each other.

In July of 2012 we held an open discussion for Pro-Choice groups. The event was organised in order for the various groups around the country to work together more fruitfully. Shortly afterwards, we held an all day workshop for people wanting to get involved in Pro-Choice campaigning that was hugely successful with over 80 attendees. From that day, the Irish Choice Network was born and some serious campaigning began. The first annual March for Choice was held on September 29th to commemorate Global Decriminalization of Abortion Day. From there, we realised that an all-island campaign was needed, and so the Abortion Rights Campaign was born. It is the main group lobbying for change around the abortion issue in Ireland (where for those of you who aren't aware abortion is still illegal). Some RAG members have been instrumental in getting the campaign off the ground, and we are all so proud of the work done across the globe to get free, safe, and legal abortion to Ireland. Last year saw the introduction of a bill allowing abortion under incredibly limited circumstances, only when the woman's life is at risk. On the heels of the second annual March for Choice, we're now looking to Repeal the 8th amendment to the Irish constitution.

We have also taken a more direct action approach of distributing women's stories of abortion to try to break the stigma surrounding it. We have distributed printouts of stories on the streets, at marches and street stalls. We more recently set up the 'Share Your Abortion Story' blog allowing women to submit stories themselves which can be seen at <http://shareyourabortionstory.tumblr.com>

2013 also brought a return to RAG's involvement in the Feminist Walking Tour. Despite the bucketfuls of freezing rain, about 80 people attended the walk. Afterwards, we warmed ourselves by the fire, drank some pints, ate some delicious vegan food, and listened to some amazing trad music, all provided by our amazing supporters.

Although we haven't put out an issue of the Rag since 2010, this recap doesn't come close to painting a full picture of what RAG has been up to since then. We've remained an active and evolving group. Hopefully we'll continue to change and grow. While we're not promising to get back on track doing yearly magazines, we'll all be busy fighting capitalism and patriarchy in our own ways :)

Love, RAG



# A Very, Very Short History of Abortion in Ireland

## Once upon a time...

the 1861 Offences Against the Person Act revised an earlier act of 1828 that made raping, assaulting, and killing a crime. They specifically include obtaining or helping someone to "procure a miscarriage" as an offence, no matter what the reason.

Since Ireland was part of the United Kingdom then, this law from 1861 was actually a British law. (Quick history lesson: There was then a War of Independence from 1919-1921, and the Irish Free State was created, followed by the creation of the Republic of Ireland in 1949. Northern Ireland is still part of the UK.) While the UK has repealed the Offences Against the Person Act of 1861, (abortion is legal in England, Scotland, and Wales up to 24 weeks, see the UK Abortion Act 1967), the legislation still on the books in Ireland, both north and south.

In 1983, abortion just wasn't illegal enough for Irish politicians and the powerful religious hierarchy, probably because it was becoming legal elsewhere, so they decided to amend the Irish Constitution so that it would never become legal in the future. "There won't be any Roe v. Wade nonsense in our country!" they said. And so the Eighth Amendment to the Irish Constitution (article 40.3.3) was passed by a referendum. This meant that it was also illegal for a woman to travel to another country for an abortion. It was even against the law to tell a pregnant woman in Ireland where she could seek an abortion in another country. The right to life of a woman became equal to that of a foetus.

Also in 1983, a woman named Sheila Hodgers was refused cancer treatment, even painkillers, because she was pregnant. Despite repeated requests for an abortion, she was

refused. She went into premature labour; the baby died immediately. Hodgers died two days later.

1992 saw the horrific Attorney General vs. X case in which the Supreme Court decided that a pregnant woman could have an abortion to save her life, including from suicide. But that didn't make abortion in any way available here for women. No guidelines were created. Abortion training for doctors was not implemented. And so in reality the ruling was kind of null.

But the X case ruling really scared anti-choicers into thinking that even the 8th Amendment didn't restrict abortion enough. "What kind of malarkey is suicide?" they said! "Anyone can say they're suicidal! That's not a real threat to a woman's life!"

In 1992, the anti-choicers tried to get more Constitutional amendments to exclude suicide as a threat to a woman's life by putting it out to vote in a referendum. The people of Ireland voted that suicide should not be excluded.

Also in 1992, the 13th and 14th Amendments to the Irish Constitution were passed. The former decreed

that women could travel for abortions, and the latter finally made it legal to provide information on abortion in other countries.

2002 saw another attempt to exclude suicide in a referendum and increase penalties for helping a woman get an abortion. Thankfully, this failed.

A woman, "D", with twins in 2001 learned that one of the foetuses had died in the womb and the other had Edwards Syndrome, which is almost always fatal. She travelled to another country for an abortion, and in 2006 filed a case against Ireland with the European Court of Human Rights. It was dismissed because she didn't take it to the Irish High Court first.

2005-2010: A, B, C vs. Ireland: Three women brought a case to the European Court of Human Rights. There's a lot of legal mumbo jumbo that I won't go into, but here's the gist: A, B, and C were three women who had travelled out of Ireland for abortions. Each of them suffered from complications afterwards and received inadequate follow-up care in Ireland. Most of their claims were dismissed. But the EU Court of Human Rights found that Ireland had violated the European Convention

on Human Rights by not putting anything in place where a woman who qualifies within the bounds of Irish law for a legal abortion can actually get one or even go about getting one.

You'd think that the ruling would have spurred the government into action to legislate on abortion in the case of the mother's life as per the Supreme Court decision in 1992, but nope.

Then in 2007, Miss D, a 17-year-old-girl whose foetus suffered from anencephaly (missing part of the brain, skull, scalp) wasn't allowed by the Health Service Executive to travel for an abortion. It went to the high court, and she won the right to travel.

An "expert group" was charged by the Irish government in January 2012 to make recommendations on "how to implement the judgement" in the A, B, C vs. Ireland case from 2010. The 14 men and women were general practitioners, psychiatrists, solicitors, Ob/Gyns, and other medical personnel.

In June 2012, an Irish group (heavily funded from the US) named "Youth Defence" started a billboard, poster, and flyer campaign "Abortion tears her life apart," claiming that "there's always a better answer." This appalling campaign spurred a whole new generation of pro-choice people to action.

In October 2012, Savita Halappanavar, an Indian woman living in Ireland began to miscarry in a Galway hospital. Due to complications, she repeatedly asked for a termination and was refused. By way of explanation, one of the midwives told her that Ireland is a Catholic country, therefore her pregnancy could not be terminated while the heartbeat was still present. She died a few days later from septicemia and organ failure. In response, TD Clare Daly proposed a bill called the "Medical Treatment (Termination of Pregnancy in Case of Risk to Life of Pregnant Woman) Bill"

in November 2012. It was defeated in the Dáil (the Irish Parliament), 100 to 27.

In November 2012, the "expert" group's recommendations on how to implement the EU judgement in the A, B, C case were published. They outlined four options: 1. Non-statutory guidelines, 2. Statutory guidelines, 3. Legislation, 4. Legislation plus regulations with the pros and cons of each.

An inquest of Ms. Halappanavar's death was held in Galway in April 2013, when it was decided that she died from "medical misadventure."

In July 2013, twenty-one years after the Irish government should have brought in guidelines and a legal framework to legislate for the X case Supreme Court decision, the Protection of Life Bill During Pregnancy Act was passed.

So we should be happy? Wrong. Let's look at the Act. Anti-choice people think it's terrible because it would supposedly "open the floodgates" of abortion, while pro-choice people think it's terrible because it criminalises abortion in Ireland even more than the 1861 Offences Against the Person Act did. The 2013 Act makes it so difficult to obtain a legal abortion, it won't make a difference to a great number of people to whom it applies.

If you're ill, say from cancer, and being pregnant prevents you from getting treatment, and therefore could lead to your death, you may have a legal abortion. But only if another doctor say it's ok.

If you're about to die and it's time sensitive, one doctor can make the call.

If you are about to die from "self-destruction" i.e. suicide, you will first need to attain permission from an Obstetrician/Gynaecologist and TWO psychiatrists. If one of those three people doesn't think you're suicidal enough, have no fear, you soon will be. Because to appeal their

decision, you have to be evaluated by another Obstetrician/Gynaecologist and two more psychiatrists. We hope we don't need to point out how inhumane and impossible this process is.

If you're found guilty of having obtained the abortion pill yourself (it can be ordered on-line), and having taken it in Ireland, you will face 14 years in prison. Think that's depressing? Get this: The average rape sentence in Ireland is 5-7 years. So if you are raped and get the abortion pill illegally, you could spend twice as long in jail as your rapist.

Let's say a woman took the abortion pill and she's having complications. She's bleeding or she has signs of infection. But she's scared of being sent to jail for terminating her pregnancy. So she doesn't seek medical attention, or she lies to them. That woman may not receive the proper treatment. You can see how this 2013 Act that's supposed to protect life actually has the potential to do a lot of harm to women's health.

But great news, ladies! We can still travel! Well, not those of us who can't afford it. Or who are asylum seekers who can't leave the country. Or undocumented citizens who can't leave. Or women in abusive relationships who are under the control of their partners. Or women who have no one to look after their children.

## The End???

Hell no! Our struggle for reproductive rights, for our right to health and right to bodily autonomy continues. If you'd like to get updates, get involved or to donate to the Abortion Rights Campaign, go to [www.abortionrights.ie](http://www.abortionrights.ie).

The image featured is from a postcard campaign in early 2013 to encourage the Irish Government to legislate for the X-case.





# Abortion Rights in Spain and Ireland: a Continuous Struggle

by Leticia

Unlike most of my Irish feminist friends, pro-choice politics were never an important issue I felt women struggled with. Don't get me wrong, I was openly pro choice in the sense I always believed women should not be forced to have an unwanted pregnancy and that they should not have to travel or pay for an abortion, but I always felt it was an issue dealt with in the past, so it didn't worry me. When I started to have sex, in the late 90s, I knew abortion was accessible for me in Spain and I never had to worry about facing an unwanted child in my life.

Since I was a kid I always knew I was an "accident". My mother was 15 years old when she got pregnant. I always remember her telling people how shocking and terrible it was for her to realise she was pregnant just after the first time she ever had sex and how she tried to take aspirins to provoke a miscarriage. Then she would add, "Do not ever have kids, it is stupid. I love you and your sisters so much but if I could go back, I wouldn't have any children". My mum and I always had a very close, loving and affectionate relationship but it never occurred to me to ask why she did not have an abortion in the first place.

My mother got pregnant in 1981, only 6 years after the death of Franco. Before that, Spain lived under a strict Catholic conservative fascist dictatorship for 40 years. In 1982, the year I was born, the Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE) came into power and 3 years later abortion was legislated.

I heard stories of people who had traveled in the 1970s to London to have an abortion. I always assumed those women were very rich and came from an upper class background who could afford a trip to London, so those stories didn't interest me.

While I was in Spain I had my first abortion. I usually don't talk about it because I find it insignificant in my life. I remember it as simple as finding out I was pregnant. Yes, it was dramatic, but I was a Spanish teenager so my life was a drama anyway. My mum booked an appointment, we



Madrid, 1934.

went to the clinic and were back home after 2 hours. It was easier than having the flu for me. Sometimes I forget I had it. Everyone around me was very supportive. It felt natural in all senses: my family, friends, medical staff, my mum's friends. It was a simple procedure that it didn't affect my life.

It was not until I moved to Ireland that I learned about pro-choice politics. I learned about the hypocrisy of this country pretending Ireland is a place without the need for abortion, when in reality women had to travel abroad, lonely and scared and stay in an unfamiliar place. I learned about the stigma those women had to face and how taboo abortion is in Ireland. I learned about the 8th amendment, Youth Defence, "the unborn child", the X case, 12 women traveling every day. Those things made me angry, and I was shocked how I never linked something as basic as women's bodily autonomy with feminism. I remember talking to Spanish friends about stories related to abortion in Ireland and they were all horrified and shocked about the situation in this country. We were not aware then how quickly things can change and that we can never take things for granted.

In Summer 2012, Youth Defence created a huge campaign all around the country. A lot of us were very furious and got together to try to organise and do something about it. During this new surge in the pro-choice movement, I became pregnant. I became pregnant and I wanted to have an abortion. I became pregnant and everything around me was related to abortion. It was very hard for me to not tell everyone about what I was going through. I think I shared too much with people I didn't know that well. I was shocked, yes, but I also was surrounded by amazing women who understood perfectly what I was going through. Still, it was hard. I was too broke to go to Spain or to the U.K. I was already in too much debt to ask a friend for a loan. I was lucky to be involved in pro-choice activism to know about Women on Web, so I ordered the abortion pills from the Internet through my friend from Belfast. I had an abortion the day after the March for Choice 2012. I did it



The 13 Roses. Read more about them in RAG Recommends.



Madrid feminist protest, 1970s.

at home, scared, in pain and feeling very lost and confused about what was happening. I wouldn't recommend it to a serious hypochondriac like me.

Weeks after, I traveled to the London Anarchist Bookfair to work at the Workers Solidarity Movement stall. There were two ladies sitting in the stall next to me. Eventually I started to chat with one of them. Her name was Anne Rossister and she mentioned she was involved with the Irish Abortion Support Network. The first thing I told her was that I recently had an abortion. She took my hand, looked at me and told me: "Why did you not contact me? You could have stayed at my house and we could have gone through this together. I would have paid for you. We always find a way to raise money". I started crying and I realized then that I was chatting with an absolute living hero.

She gave me her book, Ireland's Hidden Diaspora, and we spent all day chatting away. This was the first time I heard about the the Spanish Women's Abortion Support Group (SWAS), the sister organization of Irish Women's Abortion Support Group (IWASG). IWASG and SWASG started in the 1980s, where a brave group of women came together in sisterhood to offer any kind of help and finding their own ways. Those women, during more than 20 years, provided accommodation, information, money, and transport to women arriving in the capital for abortions in a voluntary basis and with no funding.

Blanca Fernandez, who was involved in 1987, defines those networks as the main idea of grassroots politics. They would help with anything: taking women to the clinic, making posters and banners, meetings and conferences and fundraisers. They would offer their own homes and it was a moving sense of solidarity among each other.

For Spanish women traveling to London was really hard. Unlike the Irish women, most of them did not speak English so they couldn't understand the medical staff. The Spanish Abortion Support network helped to translate and explain the procedures in Spanish. But lack of English language was not the only barrier. Isabel Ros mentioned in Anne's book how she often had to ask women to speak up on the phone, but they wouldn't. They were whispering because they were terrified of being overheard.

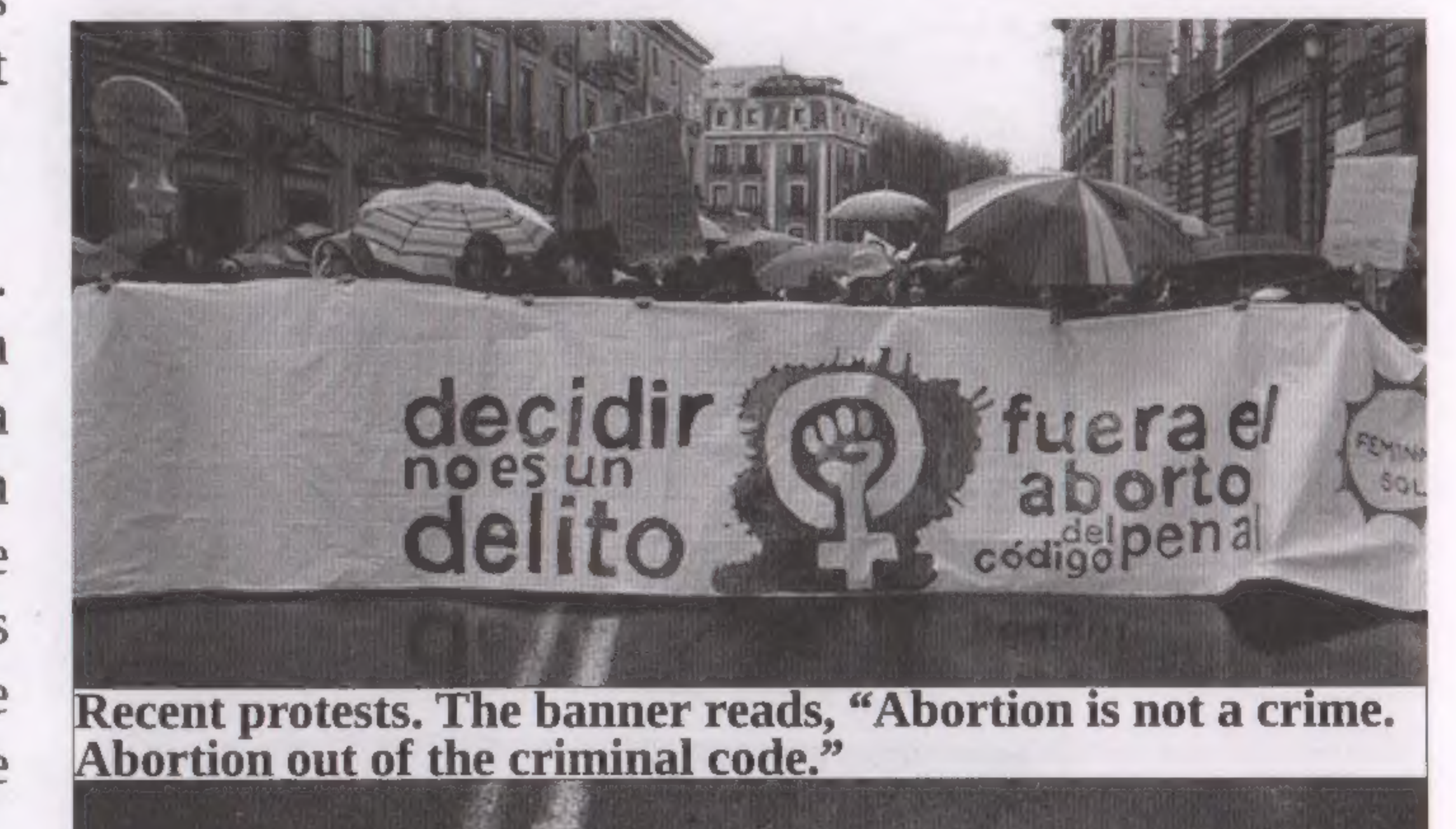
Spain's conservative right wing party, Partido Popular, is taking the opportunity of being in power at a time of economic and financial crisis to suppress women's reproductive rights, putting the clock back nearly 30 years, to when abortion was first decriminalised. It was very restrictive compared to many other European countries at the time, but a major breakthrough for women in Spain. Since 1985, (my mum could not choose to have an abortion 4 years before, in 1981) abortion was legal under 3 major conditions: to preserve the physical and mental health of the mother; if the pregnancy was a result of rape or incest, or if the foetus was likely to suffer mental or physical abnormalities at birth.

Since 2010, abortion was mainly on demand, safe, and free. However, this government wants to reform the abortion law and is using Ireland as a model to follow their plans. If the government gets its way, Spain will join Ireland to become the only two major European countries that prohibit abortion where the foetus is malformed.

Our situation in both Spain and Ireland is depressing. The more that abortion is restricted, the more desperate women will seek unsafe, backstreet abortions, putting themselves at great risk, especially in this big economic crisis that affects the most disadvantaged women who cannot afford to travel, or migrants who are not allowed to leave their country of residence. But the work that those amazing women did is too solid and impossible to break. Those women were sick of being scared. Those women are an inspiration for the new generation of pro-choice activists who are not afraid.

Both in Ireland and Spain, pro-choice activism is as big as ever. We do not want anybody to have to whisper on the phone to have an abortion in another country. We want to have all the choices available in our countries. I wish we could build this sisterhood between Irish and Spanish women again. Women still need our support, and together we can send a powerful message. I will never forget those women, the ones who, like my mother, had to face an unwanted pregnancy because they couldn't afford to travel – the ones who travelled and the ones who helped them.

They were all so brave. Cowards do not make history.



Recent protests. The banner reads, "Abortion is not a crime. Abortion out of the criminal code."



# CHOICE CUTS

EQUALITY MEANS  
REPRODUCTIVE CHOICE  
FOR WOMEN



A COMIC BY  
LMNOP



[HTTP://ARTBYLMNOP.BLOGSPOT.IE/](http://artbylmnop.blogspot.ie/)

EVEN A BIRD BRAIN CAN  
UNDERSTAND THAT!!



IRELAND IS WELL KNOWN FOR ITS MUSIC,  
POETS, PINTS AND CATHOLICISM BUT,  
THE NATION HAS A DIRTY LITTLE SECRET...

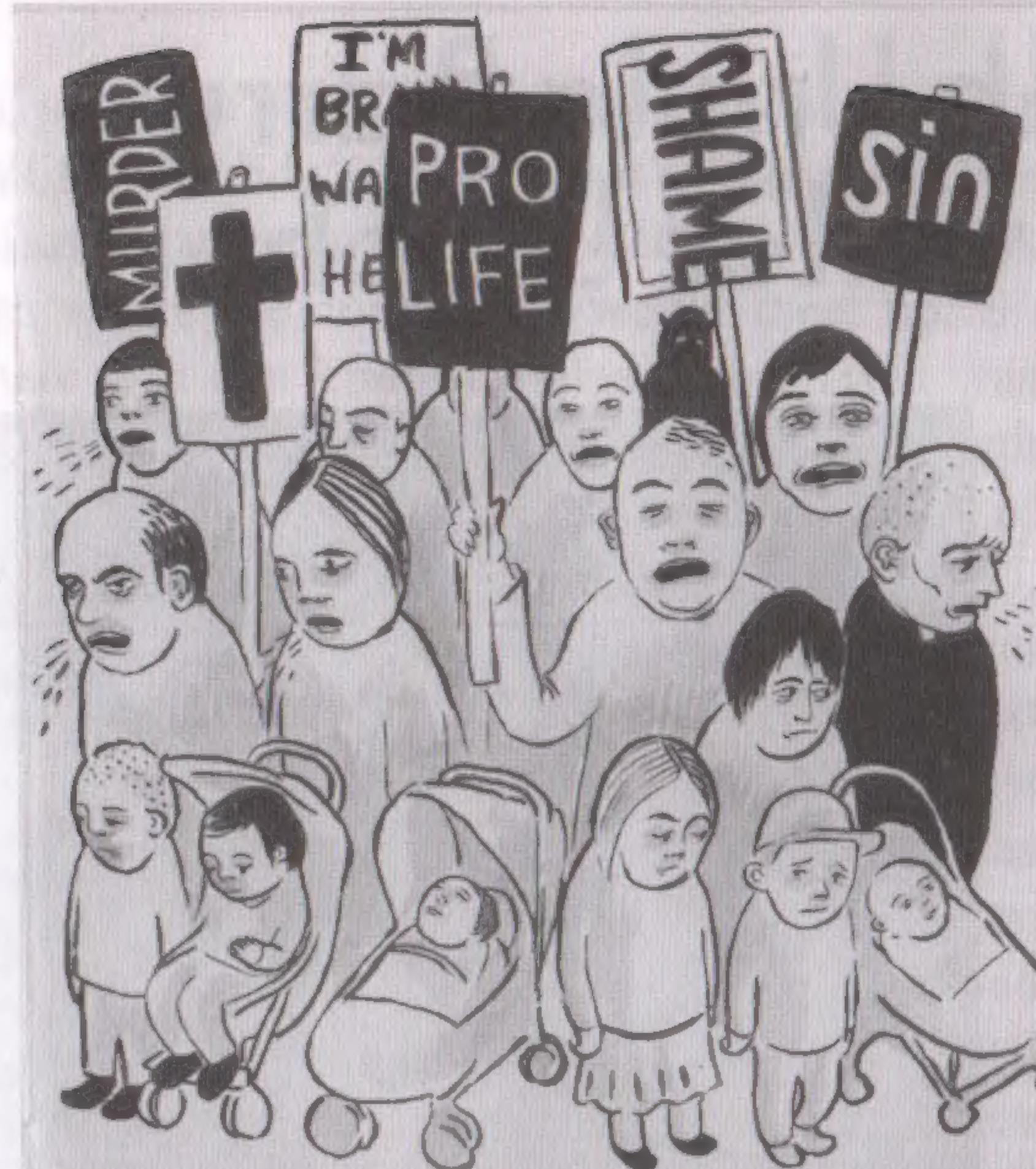
WHILE THE CHURCH AND STATE  
PLAY A DEADLY GAME OF  
TUG O' WAR WITH WOMEN'S  
REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH...



ENDA KENNY,  
T-SHOCKER

DIARMUID MARTIN, ROMAN  
CATHOLIC ARCHBISHOP OF DUBLIN

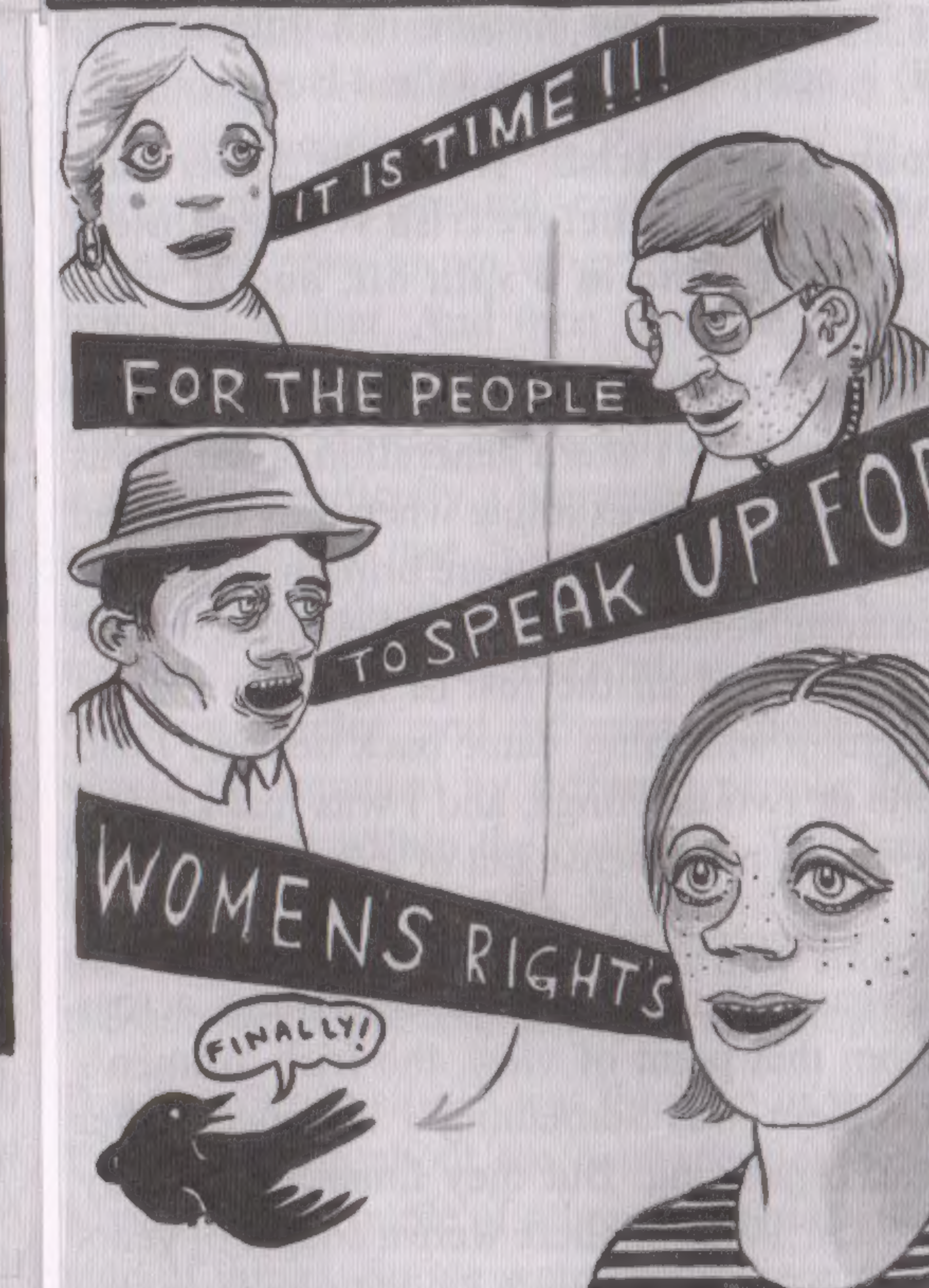
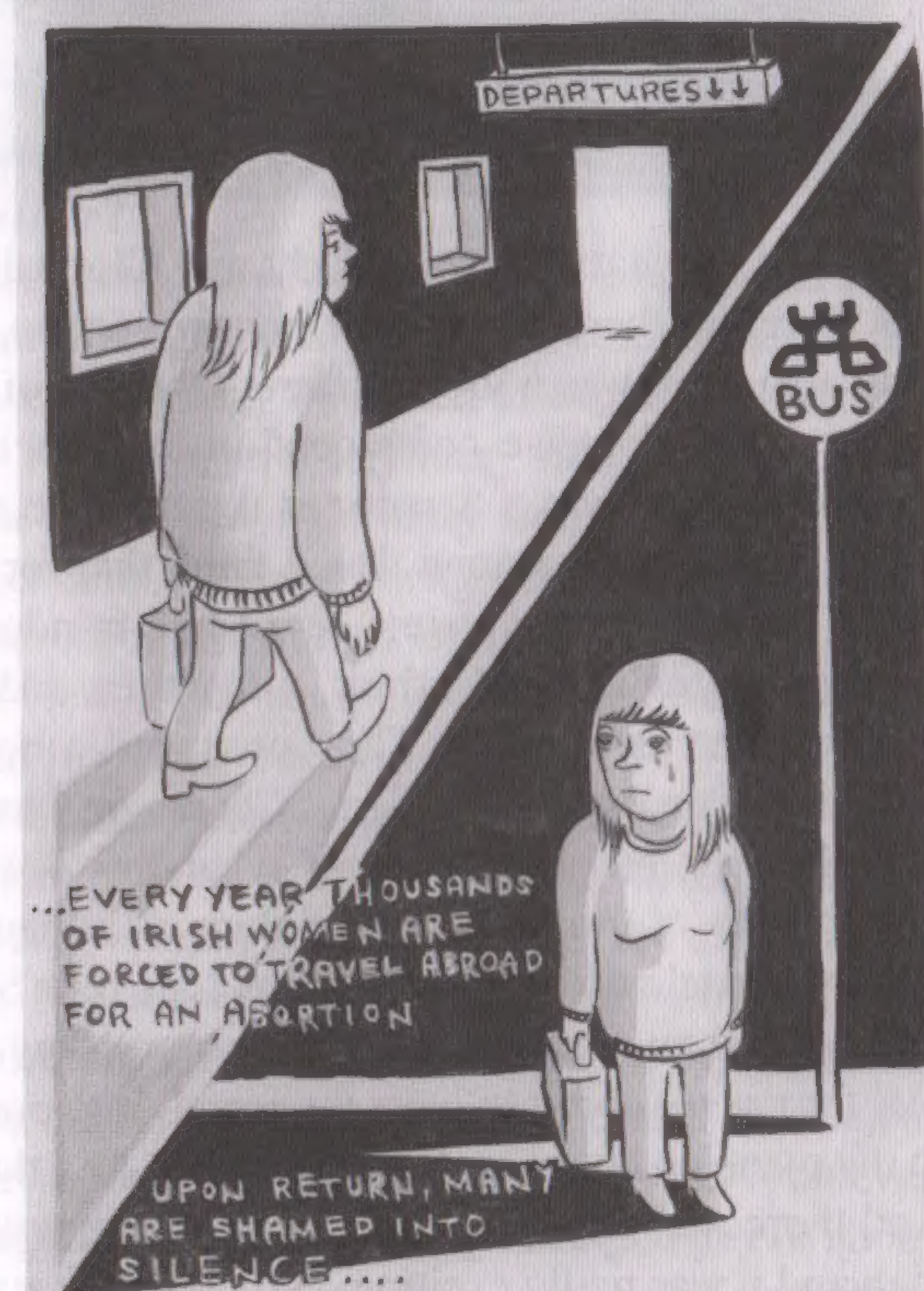
PISSED OFF  
IRISH LADY!



PRO-LIFE FUNDAMENTALISTS STRIVE  
TO KEEP WOMEN QUIETLY CONSUMED  
BY GUILT...



AND THE STATE WON'T BREAK  
THE SILENCE BECAUSE THEY'RE  
STILL CONTROLLED BY ROME



JUSTICE  
FOR  
SAVITA!!



'RELIGION SHOULD HAVE  
NOTHING TO DO WITH  
MEDICINE'

SAVITA'S FATHER  
RUSANAPPA HALAPPA



# An Interview with Ursula Barry: activist, scholar, writer, teacher

Ursula Barry is a Senior Lecturer and Deputy Head of School of Social Justice at the University College of Dublin. She specialises in social economics with a particular focus on gender, equality and public policy in Ireland. But she also has a background of activism from her earliest days at Trinity College in the late 1960s. To list her accomplishments would take an entire page. RAG wanted to talk about the early days of Irish Women United (IWU) and Banshee magazine (first published in Autumn 1975), which was featured in *The Rag*, issue #5. IWU took part in several campaigns such as the Contraception Action Campaign which led to the Family Planning Act of 1978. However, IWU fell apart prior to that, in 1977, and production of the magazine stopped. It was difficult to decide what to include here because she said so many interesting things. Her book, "Where Are We Now? New Feminist Perspectives on Women in Contemporary Ireland" (2008) is published by New Island Books.

**RAG: A group called Irish Women's Liberation Movement (IWLM) existed before Irish Women United (IWU). Was the IWU kind of a split off, and at what point did you join in?**

Ursula: Well, I suppose I had very brief involvement with the IWLM mainly because I was a generation down. I was about ten years down. So for example when they launched the contraception train, when they were bringing condoms and spermicide from Northern Ireland and challenging the police to arrest them and all the rest of it, I was part of the welcoming group when they came back because I had only gone to one or two meetings, and I was just kind of listening and trying to make sense out of everything.

I began to get more involved when I went to Trinity College in 1971, three years after the big student risings across Europe. And from that point of view, the Irish Women's Liberation Movement was something I attended rather than took part in organising. But they finished up really maybe about 1972 or 1973. So there were a couple of years between that and when Irish Women United was founded.

**RAG: So there was kind of a void.**

Ursula: Yeah. Now at the same time, there were so many things happening. There was the civil rights movement in Northern Ireland, and in January 1972 just after I started at Trinity, Bloody Sunday happened. So there was a huge mobilisation of all kinds of people: students and everybody else. And I was there when the British Embassy was burned down, that night after Bloody Sunday. I went up to the demonstrations in the North after that. There was so much going on around the North. There was the Dublin Housing Action Committee, which some of the IWLM had been very involved in; there was a kind of cross-over. So there was a huge thing about the tenements in Dublin. They were evacuating all of the tenements and basically settling



them out in what is now Tallaght and Clondalkin, and all out there. So there was a huge housing action committee. And also there was a lot of different things going on, such as the bid to legalise contraception brought in by Mary Robinson, who was a Senator at the time, so there was a bit of organisation around that. I think that for the IWLM at the beginning they were a set of like-minded women – a lot of journalists and others, altogether, and they were meeting just as a group. They produced a booklet, or a journal, just a once off called, "Chains or Change." That was the first real statement of what the demands were going to be of the IWLM. And then what happened was there was a television programme, a Late Late Show on the IWLM, and on that television programme they announced that they were going to have a general, big, open meeting in the mansion house on Dawson Street. And they did that. And there was a huge volume of people that turned up to that, and it was really exciting. But then they started trying to set up kind of regional groups from different parts of the country because everyone that came to the Mansion House was looking for a follow-up. They found it really difficult because they had just worked as a collective, discussing things, and producing this statement or position, and suddenly they were trying to work out how to deal with a national organisation with membership and all that kind of thing.

**RAG: That sounds so familiar. It's exactly what the Abortion Rights Campaign is doing right now.**

Ursula: That transition is really difficult, because it's a very different thing to work as a collective, where you know what your aims and objectives are, and you can plan what your strategy is and what demonstration you're going to call. But then if people want to get involved, and it's

the numbers, and how do you manage it? And in a way I think the IWLM just didn't survive that at that time. But that didn't mean that there wasn't still meetings and events and activities where the core group would meet up. So I suppose there was that kind of hiatus before IWU was founded. In some ways, it was a similar situation, although the difference to IWLM was they were a collective of individuals, whereas when it came to setting up of IWU, there was left wing organisations and a lot of individual feminists who became part of it. So there was the Socialist Workers movement, there was the Revolutionary Marxist group, there was Revolutionary Struggle, which I was involved with for a while, and there was this kind of tension from the very beginning between socialist feminists that had an organised platform and set of demands, then individual women who weren't used to being in a situation where there was kind of conflict going on between different left wing organisations. From the very beginning it was like that. And that hadn't been the case with the IWLM: there wasn't really an involvement of left wing organisations at that time. But that was there at the very beginning with IWU, and had to be managed constantly.

**RAG: And was there a mix of ages and socioeconomic backgrounds, or was it mainly professional people getting together?**

Ursula: There would have been more of a spread of ages and different backgrounds in IWU, compared to the IWLM whose core group consisted of about ten to twelve journalists. There wasn't anything like that in IWU. There was a lot of just individual women who were of different ages and different backgrounds. The left wing organisations brought a spread of ages as well. So from that point of view, IWU was quite different. So class issues were debated from the very beginning in IWU. Then there was a huge tension between socialist feminists and more republican feminists as well that were involved. A lot of times individual women who were part of the organisation kind of felt like these arguments between different left wing organisations created difficulties in the organisation. That was an issue, however, it still operated through a general meeting every Sunday afternoon with whatever was on the agenda, whether it was about equal pay or about contraception. A general meeting organised activities. There wasn't a Chair or a Secretary; there was nothing like that. To an extent there was a record of decisions, but there was no really formal process happening.



Irish Women United occupying the Federated Union of Employers Building

**RAG: So how did things get done? How did things get decided? Who chaired meetings and all that kind of logistical stuff?**

Ursula: We rotated chairs, and agreed a week in advance of what theme would be looked at the following week. The theme could be something about reproductive rights, or something about abortion, or it could be about different aspects of patriarchy, and all that. We would always have a theme for discussion, and then a strategy meeting. Basically people volunteered for projects during the meeting. Like, I can do that, I can do that, you know? There was a lot of self-management at that time. But there was huge enthusiasm, so when people said I want to do that, they did it. They didn't not show up! There was lots of enthusiasm in that stage. And there was a lot of direct action. So whether it was invading the 40-foot, the men-only bathing place, or whether it was taking over the office of the Federation of Employers, or whether it was stalls selling contraceptives, again like the stalls, we would go to different areas. Because of the involvement of left-wing organisations, working class areas would be targeted. We'd set up a stall in Ballymun, for example, and sell contraception that we had brought down from Northern Ireland. And there was the Contraception Action Programme. In a way, some campaigns, like around contraception, they developed a kind of core group of people who were particularly involved in that. And then Banshee established its own collective because getting a magazine together required a much tighter system, but again it was a collective editorial; it wasn't specifically a hierarchy, there wasn't a convener or anything like that. It was a set of people who formed a collective and divided up responsibilities between them. In terms of trying to get subscriptions, between managing the different articles, and different sections of the magazine would be managed by different people. Roles were just broken down within the collective. IWU really didn't try to set up a Cork, Galway, Waterford base. Partly because they'd learned from IWLM that they couldn't do it from the outside. It had to either arise organically or not.

But there's one story I was thinking of this morning when I was thinking about the contraception action campaign. Myself and a couple of others were pretty involved in that side of things. So we were doing these distribution stalls and all the rest of it, and then were trying to get invited by women's groups. There were a lot of women's groups in working class areas that were involved. They would meet every week and sometimes they would invite a speaker or organise courses, that kind of thing. Community-based groups. So we were trying to hook up with them. So we got invited to this group in Ballymun on the night of their meeting, around contraception. And we had got from the Irish Family Planning Services samples of all the different kinds of contraceptives. We planned to talk about all the different kinds of contraception, like an information thing. (laughing) So we were doing that, and we had a cap, and a coil, and a pill, and we'd go through all these things with, you know, diagrams of the women's reproductive system. First of all, we hadn't got a clue. But at one stage, we were talking about condoms, and Pauline, who was with me at that time, took from our sample box to show



the women how a condom worked. And she was trying to unravel it, and one of the working class women who was there said, "Um, that's not a condom. That's the cap." So here's Pauline with this rubber cap, trying to demonstrate it. I suppose we were operating under the assumption that we were coming in with the knowledge and information, (laughs) and the whole thing collapsed in laughter anyway. We formed a good relationship with that group over time, but it was absolutely mental that we were going around pretending that we knew what we were doing, really.

**RAG: Getting back to the direct actions that you guys used to do, you wrote in your essay, "Movement, Change and Reaction: The Struggle Over Reproductive Rights in Ireland," (for the 1992 book, Abortion Papers) that there was an irreverence in the early days. I feel like that irreverence has dissipated quite a bit since then. Why do you think that is?**

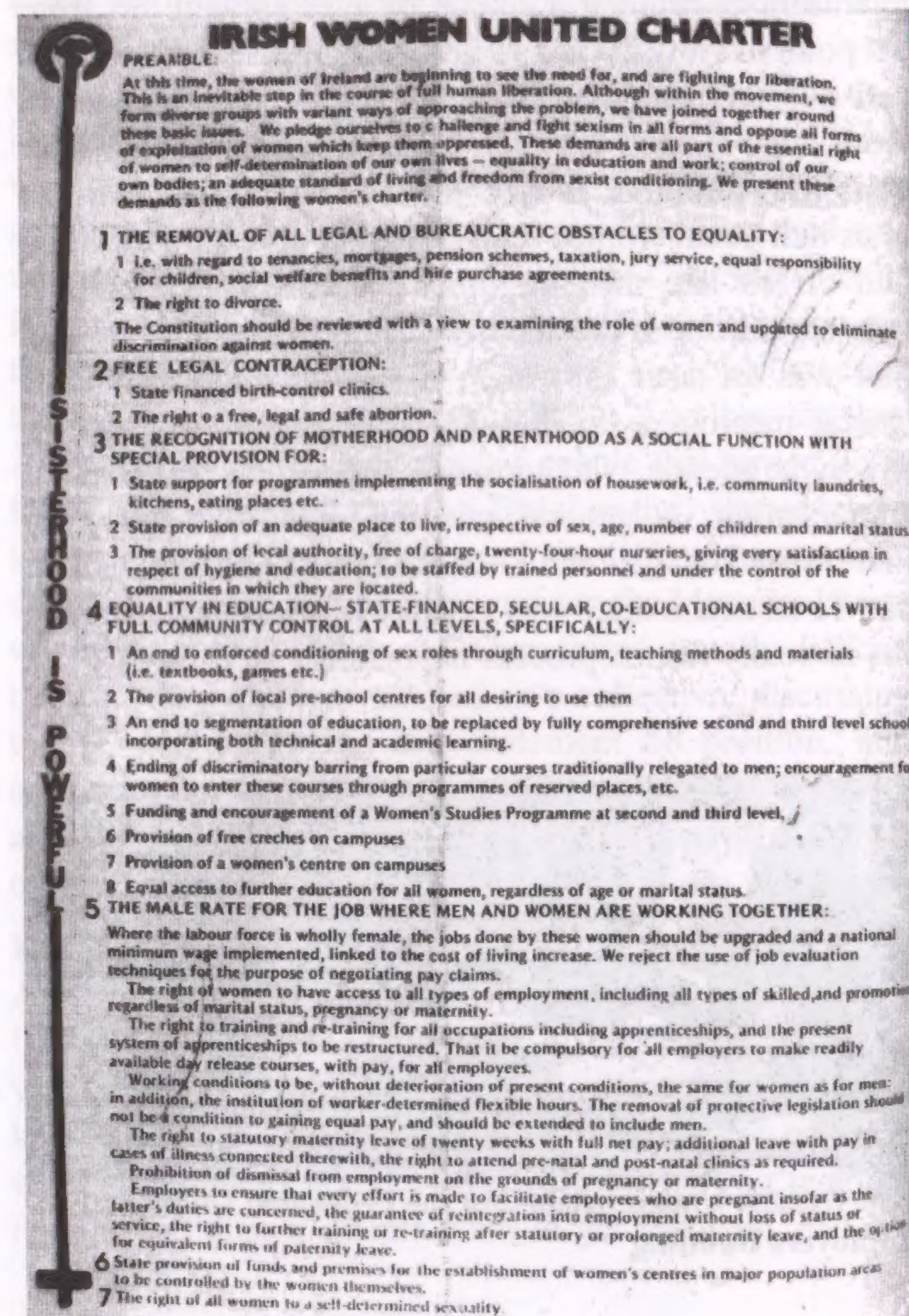
Ursula: I'm not sure, actually! It was a very different time, the seventies, and it was all new to people. It was like, we're all doing this for the first time. Learning was exchanged between, say, the Civil Rights Movement both in Northern Ireland and in America and other places – that whole philosophy of direct action. For example in Northern Ireland people were refusing to pay the rent on their houses, or the street protests, sitting, blocking streets – all that kind of direct action seemed as if it was new, although if you look back to the suffragettes, they were involved in direct action of all kinds. It was only gradually through people writing for Banshee and our general meeting when we were discussing themes that we were really rediscovering a history. We were operating upon the basis as if we made this all up from the very beginning, not even realising.

I don't know about the irreverence. We would go into pubs because they wouldn't serve pints to women, and we had this strategy that we'd go in and order hot whiskeys. And then we'd order the pints. When they wouldn't give us the pints, we wouldn't pay for the hot whiskeys. They couldn't put the whiskey back in the bottle, so they'd lose money. And we'd go from pub to pub, just doing that same thing. It caught on, and then the media covered it, and other publicans would find out about it, then they knew. We didn't have a self-consciousness of what we were doing; it was just like this is wrong and we're going to tackle it in whatever way. We're not going to respect that space and we're going to invade it. We're going to swim the 40 foot, we're going to take over Fitzwilliam Tennis Club because they didn't allow women members. We were conscious that that kind of direct action could get a lot of media coverage, so maybe there was a link back to that and the IWLM: the importance of getting media coverage. A small group could suddenly look like they were quite powerful. When we took over the office of the Federated Union of Employers because they were refusing to pay out on the Equal Pay Directive, even though it was a directive that had come from Europe, it was just so easy to get into the building and take over the boardroom. Today, communication would be shut down. At that time, they were experienced in dealing with protests like that. So we would be on their phone, and 12 we'd be able to take over a building like that without much

hassle. And also, the police at that time, when they were called over for something like that, they didn't treat people roughly, which is so different now. Any demonstration that takes over a building or blocks roads is treated very aggressively these days. It's very different.

**RAG: There seems to be more fear now. The irreverence and fearlessness seems to lend itself to other things like humour, which is a strong element of Banshee magazine. It's very funny!**

Ursula: We spent a lot of time together socialising, in the pubs or whatever. There was a spillover between political organising and socialising, so from that point of view I suppose it was really intense on one level, but not serious. It was intense, like, we can change the world kind of feeling. We believed that we could seriously effect change, and that was the atmosphere of the time. So '76, '78 was the high point really of IWU, but then when you turn the corner into the 80s, everything changes. And I still think that the build up to the anti-abortion amendment – the campaign started in '81 really – and then the whole pro-life organisation started up. There was a very big anti-amendment campaign that was organised in a much more formal way. You had Dublin 4, 6, 8, various constituencies but the right wing organisations were really organised; they became very powerful and very intimidating so that you suddenly saw issues of demands for change no longer generally being portrayed positively or as legitimate in the media. You had the anti-abortion movement, really strong, and women's organisations on the other side, creating a big divide there. The media was split, but predominately anti-abortion. That was a very different situation to be organising in. And it was



massively divisive, hugely negative campaigning by the anti-abortion people, and it was a horrible atmosphere. Of course the amendment was passed in September 1983. The fact that we got 30% of the vote at that time was actually quite an achievement given the scope of the anti-abortion culture in Ireland. The right had still won, however.

And it was a huge downer. There was a recession, and mass emigration going on. There was a referendum on divorce that was lost. The 80s was not a good space, and so I think people retreated more into their personal lives. The networks of people continued to exist because of friendships, but the core of militancy and organisation really fell apart until the X case, which is a long time (1992).

**RAG: What was your favourite feature in the magazine?**

Ursula: There was a lot of debate generated by Margaret Mead when she came over about gender roles. She has done ethnographic studies on gender roles in different tribes. There was a lot of debate around the question of whether there are biologically determined gender roles. In the 70s that was all being argued out, in a way: Are gender roles naturally different and distinct because of our biology? I think a lot of those arguments and the

spreads that were done around those issues created a lot of debate. And on one hand there was the argument that women are naturally caring, etc. and on the other hand we refused to accept prescribed gender roles. Even amongst the socialist feminists and the radical feminists there was tension around whether women should be accessing paid employment vs. wages for housework. That was a big point of difference, whether wages for housework was the way to go or whether it was paid employment with access to service and subsidised child care.

**RAG: Do you think the constant series of defeats has affected momentum?**

Ursula: It's been incredibly difficult to keep momentum between crisis points such as the X case, the C case, Savita Halappanavar. You get this huge increase in activity and then people trying to maintain momentum. Over the years I've been involved in organisations specifically trying to do that: Alliance for Choice, Safe and Legal Abortion, etc. Trying to keep a thread, and it's very difficult. Trying to keep a sense of urgency highlighted through individual cases, and that's been the dynamic all of the time that moves thing. Because of the right to travel, it's only those individual cases that have brought the pressure point to an increased level that has generated activity for a stretch of time. It's incredibly difficult! And it's over a stretch of so many god damned years as well! When you think that

from the late 60s/early 70s, campaigns and organisations around reproductive rights have been ongoing, we're into our fifth decade, and that's just the second wave. And it gets exhausting for people as well.

**RAG: In a really short amount of time!**

Ursula: Yeah! And also it could demand a lot of resources. The campaigns to defend clinics, and trying to get finances for that, legally, or the case that was brought against the USI by the Society for the Protection of Unborn Children and again you have all those legal costs. And then you have the Abortion Support Network, and it's very demanding because it's not just hit the streets but there's a lot of service provision as well, which takes a lot of energy. And then there's high points, like the abortion boat that we took, which was inspired by the contraception train

from Belfast. We were taking the abortion boat to England and bringing back abortion information, which was at that stage illegal, and distributing it, challenging to be arrested. So we were kind of paralleling one kind of direct action with another. But that was 1992, and the contraception train was 1972, so that was 20 years between one and the other.

**RAG: Do you think burnout was a factor in the breakdown of Irish Women United?**

Ursula: I do. I think it's very hard to avoid burnout. And sometimes the problem is that an organisation runs down and nobody ever says, "Irish Women United is at an end"; it kind of falls apart. Or the Contraception Action Programme, or whatever, and nobody ever wants to say this organisation has run its course; that never seems to happen. In a way, there's often a little denial going on that actually things aren't working like they were working, say two years ago or whatever, and you get a core group of people keeping it going, and then they get burned out.

**RAG: I guess there's no magic answer for how to avoid that. Or do you think, in hindsight, that there is?**

Ursula: I think there needs to be more reflection and discussion during times of high levels of action because just trying to maintain the action is just too difficult on its own. The Abortion Symposium is producing the 2013 Abortion Papers, which we're working on, but I think there's a desire to have discussion as well, to think and talk. Sometimes we don't combine different forms enough. We just try to relentlessly go on when there's an opportunity for activism around, for example, an individual case. We try to keep that momentum up, and it's hard.

A full version of the interview is available to read on our blog, <http://ragdublin.blogspot.ie/>



# The Politics of Pregnancy

words by Marianne  
artwork by Michelle

Since becoming pregnant I have been thinking a lot about the wording of the 8<sup>th</sup> amendment to the Irish Constitution, which says, "The State acknowledges the right to life of the unborn and, with due regard to the equal right to life of the mother, guarantees in its laws to respect, and, as far as practicable, by its laws to defend and vindicate that right." This amendment was added to the constitution 30 years ago this month. In part it's the 'due regard to the equal right to life' that gets to me. It sounds like a bit of an afterthought. I mean, has my life only been equal to the life of the baby I'm growing inside me since I became pregnant?

Now that I'm in my last trimester, my baby is viable outside me on its own. In theory, if anything went wrong there would be no need for either of us to die in order for the other to live, or to carry on a

to survive outside my womb? If something had gone wrong at this stage would it have been ok to put my life on the line? Did my life become devalued because I got pregnant? I have a partner, a family, friends, people who love me and depend on me. Other pregnant women may have older children to care for who would grow up without a mother if her life was not valued enough to put it ahead of her developing foetus. Some pregnant women may care for parents, partners, grandparents, disabled children etc. Some may simply be individuals with none of the above responsibilities who just want to live.

Are women's lives really comparable to the potential life of 'the unborn'?

A new law, passed in July 2013, and named the 'Protection of Life During

it is really the same as an implanted fertilised egg? It's all connected to an idea embedded in our society that women, and especially mothers, should be completely selfless. We should want to willingly lay down our lives, our health, our jobs, for our children, and in this case even our zygotes. Maybe I haven't developed my maternal instinct just yet but I feel a little sceptical about it.

At the same time, the government cuts specifically target pregnant women and families. Maternity benefit is being taxed for the first time this year. Every budget attacks single parents and women first. Child benefit and back to school allowance have been cut in the last and every recent budget. So we are expected to be self-sacrificing in every way and put the unborn child ahead of ourselves in every way, but the government does not have to value these children. When we compare this to how much women have to put into the child before they're born the contrast is startling. Once they're born they're just another mouth to feed. The National Women's Council of Ireland, reacting to the last budget, said, 'More families will have to make impossible decisions between offering a healthy and warm meal for their children or going to the doctor with their sick child.'

## Pregnancy and Choice

Pregnancy and the restrictions it imposes should be a woman's decision and her own choice. Pregnancy restricts a woman in so many ways. It can be a lonely time. Unless you have pregnant friends around you, no one else is going through the same emotions and

feeling the same restrictions. During the first trimester a lot of women feel sick and weak, usually while trying to hide from people the fact that they're pregnant and pretend everything is normal. The second one for me was great; I felt so much better and people knew I was pregnant. Other than not drinking alcohol and finding it slightly harder to go walking, it was by far the least restrictive time. I could stay out late without feeling tired and friends helped a lot by not smoking around me. The third trimester has been harder. I feel tired a lot, can't sleep properly, and until recently had still been working full time which got really hard towards the end. I can't cycle and can't go out to meet people easily as I find getting places harder. I can't go for long walks or stay up late and have to sit down a lot. Does this sound like a giant whinge? Maybe it is. Maybe you're thinking, don't be so selfish, you chose to get pregnant. Well, yeah actually I did. But what about all the women with unwanted pregnancies? My point is, pregnancy is not easy; no one should be forced to do it.

The lack of choice for women carrying unviable foetuses is a horrific example of how we place so little value on the mental wellbeing of women in an awful situation. Rather than helping the woman to deal with a very difficult situation in a caring and compassionate way, giving her the choice of whether to carry to term or not, women are forced to carry a child they know will never live, because whether viable or not, our government have chosen to interpret the constitution as giving her unviable child the same right to life as herself. Not only that, many people feel that pregnant women should happily carry the pregnancy to term, sacrificing her own feelings, her own mental wellbeing and be glad to do it. It is barbaric.

**An outsider in my own pregnancy**  
Dealing with the HSE (Irish state health service) and the medical system can also make you feel less than included in your own pregnancy. At 28 weeks I suddenly got severe and crippling pain in my left side in the middle of the night. Once I calmed down and the sun rose, I realised the baby was moving exactly as normal. It was fine and I was the one in pain. I googled my symptoms and saw it was probably round ligament pain and fairly common. I read that women



often go to A&E with it only to be sent home. I couldn't walk or lie down or the pain returned. The following day I went to see the midwife in my GP surgery. She sympathised, said it was probably ligament pain, and sent me to the hospital 'just in case'. I was there for about an hour hooked up to a monitor to check the baby's heartbeat when a doctor came and told me the baby was fine and I could go home. I said that I knew the baby was fine and that it was me that was the one in pain. He suggested taking a panadol on a regular basis for the next few months or however long it went on for. I didn't want to take painkillers. If this is so common, why is there no other solution? Why does no one tell you it might happen? (For anyone out there experiencing it, try yoga, I've been told aqua-natal classes help but I found them hard to find in Dublin. Acupuncture might also help. Reassuringly, it is caused by stretching in your bump and it will go away.)

When I googled this pain I found loads of other pains that pregnant women can get: pelvic girdle pain (PGP), lower back pain, hip pain, etc. Since then I've also experienced what I think is mild PGP (no one has really told me what it is exactly). The main advice for almost everything is that it will go away after the baby is born. Great! Just another few months of pain and not being able to walk. I have been so lucky in my pregnancy – for some women back and hip pain can start in the first few weeks and go on all the way through. But these are the sacrifices we are supposed to make. The attempts to relieve the pain for women are feeble. What should be a happy time for women becomes a nightmare that they just wait out for 9 months.

## The system knows best

While I was still working I went into a shop to buy cigarettes for someone. I felt totally judged and felt I had to say 'they're not for me' when the guy paused before handing them to me. I have heard stories from other women of being refused cups of coffee when they try to buy one. Our society judges pregnant women and expects them to always put their unborn child first, before any needs or desires they might have themselves. Women are expected to stop smoking, stop drinking alcohol completely, eat only healthy foods (which is hard when you're constantly hungry) give up soft ice-cream, mayonnaise, soft cheese, anything and everything people have heard can do some kind of damage. The rules we are supposed to follow are arbitrary, contradictory. Even though everyone will tell you something different, we are supposed to follow all of them. In different countries and cultures you will be told completely different things. Different doctors will give you different information. Everyone you meet will give you their own version.

Trying to assert myself in any way about my choices, I have been made to feel as if I'm trying to butt in on someone else's business and worse still trying to put my baby's life at risk.

healthy and happy life. In the case of any problems, options such as early induction or Caesarean section mean the baby would have a great chance of developing normally. But what about in the first few months of my pregnancy? Is it really fair to say that my life is equal to that of a developing foetus with no chance

conception). That was the day my life was devalued. At least I know now. I keep thinking, why are there not pregnant women all over the country shouting, 'wait there just one minute! Whose life are we protecting here?' Yes, ok, I agree that my life is equal to any other living human, but



On a bottle of alcohol here in Ireland there's a picture of a pregnant woman with a line through it. It's not a person driving a car or operating heavy machinery, it's a pregnant woman. In fact studies vary wildly on how much small amounts of alcohol harm babies during pregnancy, but I have yet to see an article claiming drink-driving is anything but dangerous. Whether the chances of you getting food poisoning from cheese are 1000000:1 or not, whether smoking one cigarette a week/day/month does or does not have a huge impact, whether the risks you take are serious or not, it's always meant to be a risk you're not willing to take just in case it should harm your precious cargo. Even if it's 30 degrees and you're dying for an ice cream. Even if you're stressed out of your mind and would love just one smoke. And you better not be stressed because that can harm the baby. It's not just your business anymore either; it's everyone's. It's on the wine bottle.

#### Birth options

The birth itself is another experience that women go through that seems to be mainly taken out of our hands. It is treated as a medical procedure best left up to the professionals instead of a natural act women have been doing for all human history. I mean, if I was having heart surgery, I might do some research (I probably wouldn't) but I would certainly leave the surgery up to the doctors. Giving birth however, is not an illness or an accident, but a natural occurrence. This was my first time being in hospital a lot and having regular consultations with medical professionals, and for the most part they have been great. But a lot of what I read and how I felt was contradicted by them. I would have liked a home birth; my obstetrician said that no one should have them because they're too dangerous. In the UK it's much more common than here to have home births, and I knew they wouldn't be happening there if

it was so dangerous. I couldn't have one anyway due to fibroids (and expense) but the option would have been nice. Choices around the birth are more like preferences, there is a feeling from a lot of pregnant women I know that they have very little real say when it comes down to it. In my pre-natal yoga class the major fear that comes up is one of the loss of control and lack of choice during the birth process. For me, trying to discuss birth options with my obstetrician has been frustrating. Trying to assert myself in any way about my choices I have been made to feel as if I'm trying to butt in on someone else's business and worse still trying to put my baby's life at risk. For most women it's a matter of just surrendering to a system that says it knows best. Women and their feelings can be an afterthought when all attention is focused on the baby. While of course we all want the

I found it really hard to write this in a tone that didn't make excuses for what I'm trying to say. It's very hard to express concern for the rights of women without making statements undermining yourself. I've been trying not to use statements like 'we all just want what's best for the baby' or somehow saying that the baby should come first. It's ingrained in how we speak and the phrases people use when you are pregnant. All that matters is a healthy happy baby. We are glowing when we feel like crap, we are blossoming when we feel like our legs can't support us anymore. Some women feel great during their pregnancies and some don't but the way we are treated and the choices that are taken away from us have a lasting impact on our well-being. The struggle for a mother to put the foetus/baby/child before yourself continues on until the age of 18 as far as I can figure out. Our own



baby to be born healthy, the cliché that this is the only thing that matters is untrue. Often women can be left upset and traumatised at what should be a happy time in their lives due to treatment from medical staff at the birth. This can lead to postnatal depression or post traumatic stress.

lives, our feelings, our plans, hopes and desires are expected to go on the back burner and we should always put our children first. Maybe I'll write another article about it in 18 years time for issue 24 of The Rag.

## HOW DO YOU KNOW WHEN SOMEONE WANTS TO BE KISSED

BY SHEILA

So we know that Ireland has pretty bad sex educators. Here's a quick guide for improving consent. By no means comprehensive, it's just a starting point. Most of it is glaringly obvious but gets forgotten quite a lot. Also I will pop down some links at the end so ya can go explore further after this brief-n-sweet piece on getting the sound shag.

How do you know when someone wants to be kissed? The look in their eye; the electricity between yis, having the laugh, brushing off each other? Great! Have the flirt all ya want but it's always a good idea to ask before you go in for anything. Words won't kill the passion; your lack of imagination could though. You can be as filthy or sweet as ya want when you ask to kiss someone. By not asking, you're setting up a situation where it's ok to do things without permission, where what you want comes first as opposed to sussing it out together.

This asking business kinda runs through good consent all the way. It is all about getting clear go aheads so there's only room for enjoyment and no space for confusion. Some dopes will say constantly asking is a buzz killer, but that's what people said about condoms in the eighties. Actually on the note of johnnies, the Irish population are pretty bad with using them. Carrying condoms with you at all times can only be a good thing. Have them in various places your purse, coat pocket, guitar case where ever. Don't leave yourself in the position of bursting for the shag and optimistically eyeing up cling film.

Be prepared. If you know you are going be in a place where a hook-up is a possibility, know what you want. You may just want a shift, maybe a bit of drop the hand action. Maybe you are only interested in giving or getting some oral, or totally up for anonymous shag. If you know what ya want and what you're not up for beforehand, you're in a better position to communicate it and not get violated. Then again, it's cool to change your mind at any point.

Check in with yourself and whoever it is you are getting stuck

into. Kissing on a dance floor, roaming hands about the place is all well and good, but don't lose the run of yourself unless you want to. Take a minute between kisses to see if you are up for going the whole hog or even progressing a bit more on. It's far easier to swap numbers and take things further another time than to be in a randomer's flat, face down in a pillow, not having a good time and worrying about your taxi fare home. Having a quick feel on a night out isn't a binding contract for having sex.

Think about sex. Have a continuous conversation about sex with yourself and whoever you are hooking up with. Things change constantly; some days you want whips, other days you just want to snuggle and have Eskimo kisses. Your sexing partner probably is not endowed with phisic abilities, so it is up to you to communicate what you want. It is also up to your partner to listen.

When starting any kind of relationship it's a good idea to draw up a list of sexy yeses, nos, give it a gos, and not a hopes list early on. Everyone has different needs, tastes and preferences and no one should be made feel bad for what they are and aren't into, nor co erced or forced into something they are not ready for yet or not up for at all. Drawing up a list earlier on also highlights how sexually compatible the hook up is. Some people hate sex in bedrooms and will get the ride everywhere and anywhere else. Other people can only shag with the curtains closed and the lights off. Everyone's different.

Communication isn't just about listing off what you are into and not into. Sex is a two-way thing, three-way thing, however many people you are hooking up thing. As important as it is to define what you want, it's just as important for you to hear what your partner(s) are up for. Because we come from a culture of sexual shame and silence, lots of people don't have the words to let you know where they are at. Look for other signs: Do they still look like they are having fun?

SEX  
IS THE  
BEST  
FORM  
OF FREE  
ENTERTAINMENT



Have they gone quiet all of a sudden? Is their body going through the motions but their head appears to be elsewhere? Have you been doing the same thing for too long? Are you going too fast and your partner's bored while you're having a great time? What do you do in that situation? It can't be said enough: JUST ASK. There is nothing sexier than someone drawing you closer, pulling back your hair and whispering into your ear, "How good does this feel for you?"

What do you do if you're having the time of your life but your partner's in the best scenario bored, worst case freaking out inside but can't express it? Obviously stop. Don't be a sap. What do you then? Check in. Make sure your partner's alright. Sometimes its game over; other times it's a case of doing something differently. With sex a lot of it is 'n' giggles but people are in a vulnerable position, you need to be just as concerned that your fucking buddy is having as good a time as you are. The generation of entitlement that we are within doesn't promote this idea but it's a very good one.

A common occurrence within sex is that only one partner comes. Woohoo good for them! What about the other partner? Again, just be sound. Don't leggit or fall asleep until they've got theirs. Another bullshit idea that gets plastered in our faces is that sex is all about the earth shattering orgasms. This in turn makes sex this mad race for the big O. The screamfest according to porn is all about the ploughing penetration. Sex is the best form of free entertainment. Our bodies have a million different nerve endings to be explored, played with and enjoyed. Unfortunately the mainstream media would have you thinking that any hole is a goal. Taking your time and enjoying being touched, tickled, slapped and caressed is all part of sex and not just an appetiser before the main meal.

We all bring histories with us: 1 in 3 women are sexually assaulted at some point in their lives. Deal with it; don't bury it and talk to your partners about it. Everyone deals with things in different ways and on their own timescale. The important thing is to deal with it. Confide in friends; seek out counseling, find forums, and read self-help books – whatever works best for you. A huge part of losing control is taking it back, so find ways that work for you to navigate sex. Certain positions can be triggering, or someone holding you a certain way can set off a mental freak out. Some words, smells, and places are a no-go. Fill your partners in, let them know. The conversation doesn't have to be soul bearing or

a series of no goes. It's your conversation, but a way I have found to work is, hey I'm not really into whatever it is, do you mind if we don't, but do you know what really turns me on is..... and I only mention my sexual history if I feel the need to. Sometimes it's as easy as switching positions to bring me back to the throes of excitement.

Boozing is a big factor in whether you're able to give and receive consent. Over 80% of reported rapes in Ireland involved excessive alcohol. Boozing does not cause rape, but it is used as an excuse for really shitty behaviours. We are never going to live on an island running on the dry, but it's something to be aware of. At sessions, keep your wonky eyes on your mates. Keep a look out for people at pubs, clubs, and festivals who appear to be on their own. If you're hooking up with someone you just met, introduce them to your mates before legging it. Fake rape is summit that gets called out a fair bit, but actually studies show that 98% of rape allegations are legit. But still, it's a dodgy grey area that alcohol murkies even further.

Beyond sexual assault, booze really does impair judgement. It can be a great social lubricant, but also a huge factor in assault, not using condoms, and bad communication. Drunken sex (well it depends on how drunk you are) can be a really sloppy, long, uncoordinated affair. More fun could be had making out and meeting up another time. Don't feel pressured into going the whole hog with someone. You are not being a tease, nor are you there for someone else's gratification. Sex is a mutual thing for equal enjoyment and not being able to say your own name may not be the best time to try and figure out having sex with someone new.

Sex can be amazingly brilliant. It's one of my favourite things to do. It feels great, it's a stress reliever, intimacy builder, personal liberator, cardiovascular exerciser – all kinds of amazingness. Good consent only makes things better. Two easy things to remember: always ask and always listen.

Helpful resources:

<http://phillyspissed.net/>

<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/11/20/magazine/teaching-good-sex.html?pagewanted=all&r=0>

<http://goodmenproject.com/families/the-healthy-sex-talk-teaching-kids-consent-ages-1-21/>



# we're telling

## \*Trigger Warning - rape\*

I don't like the term 'survivor' I never have done. I get that it's supposed to be empowering and all that, I do and I would never tell anyone who has been raped not to consider themselves one, it's just not for me. Before getting into things: this is probably going to be a very hate filled article. As I write this it's coming up to the third year anniversary of me being raped and I guess that's where the inspiration to write it all down comes from. *(As I edit this now, it has been just over 5 years)* Every person who has been raped has a different tale to tell and I've heard and read many, each one making me feel slightly less alone. This, along with my own selfish reasons

is why I'm going to tell you mine. I don't do statistics (even if I have to study it) because they have only ever served to make me feel bad. Being told that a majority of rapes occur in such and such a way when mine didn't makes me feel that my experience wasn't as important or as harmful as something that happened to someone else. No matter how it happened to you or anyone you may know, never feel like it's not as important, not as terrible. It is. Though all this is easier said than done.

Now for the hard part. There are only three people that I have ever told exactly what happened to me. There are probably hundreds who know I've been raped since my decision a year and a half ago to be vocal about my experience.

Anyway I'll get on with it.

The summer of 2008 was the summer I left school, went to Ibiza, and fulfilled my teenage dream of going to the Leeds festival. But dreams never turn out exactly the way you want them to, right? It was the first night, the Friday. Metallica



were the last band to play and my friend and I managed to get very near the front. My belly button piercing was infected and I could not stick all the pushing and shoving from the crowd. The girl behind me noticed I was in pain and got her boyfriend to lift me up so that the security guard could get me out of the crowd. This however meant that I was separated from my

friend. It was around nine thirty and I only had a t-shirt and shorts on, so I made my way back to the tent and put on another t-shirt. I then went to watch Metallica by myself. I was worried about being separated from my friend, but couldn't contact her as she had both of our phones. I waited at the exit for her until all the crowd had gone, getting more and more worried and upset the longer I stood there. Then this man came over and asked if I knew the way out of the arena. I could see that Laura wasn't at the main stage so I went with him to show him. I told him all about not knowing where my friend was and why I had to leave her at Metallica. He invited me to his campsite for a drink and a chat. I went with him thinking it would be better



to get my head straight before looking for my friend. On the way we talked, I told him where I was from, what I did etc. I tend to talk quite a bit when I'm anxious. He told me he was there with his friend who had bought all the same stuff as him, that he had been to Leeds for the past few years. He was there to see Biffy Clyro. I told him I was going to study German and Spanish. He said he would like to be a tour guide in Latin America and he was going to be a tour guide in Asia in a couple of weeks. Also he was going to stay with a family in Barcelona as part of some sort of thing to learn Spanish. He had

either finished or almost finished university. He said he had a neutral university accent. When we got to his tent we sat outside and talked. There were other people outside the tent to the right. They didn't speak to us. He gave me ale to drink, the Old Speckled Hen. He said something about where he came from and how that brand of ale related to him. I can't remember. I didn't drink the ale, perhaps about two or three sips. Then he asked to go inside the tent. I know what he implied by this and said no. He kept asking me. I kept saying no I shouldn't, my friend would be worrying. I was quite disorientated. I didn't know how to act. I eventually agreed to go in his tent hoping that it was just to talk. I sat with my legs outside the tent, I couldn't get my wellies off; they were too muddy. I didn't want to touch them. I did get them off using my feet and sat cross-legged in the tent looking at the floor. As soon as this

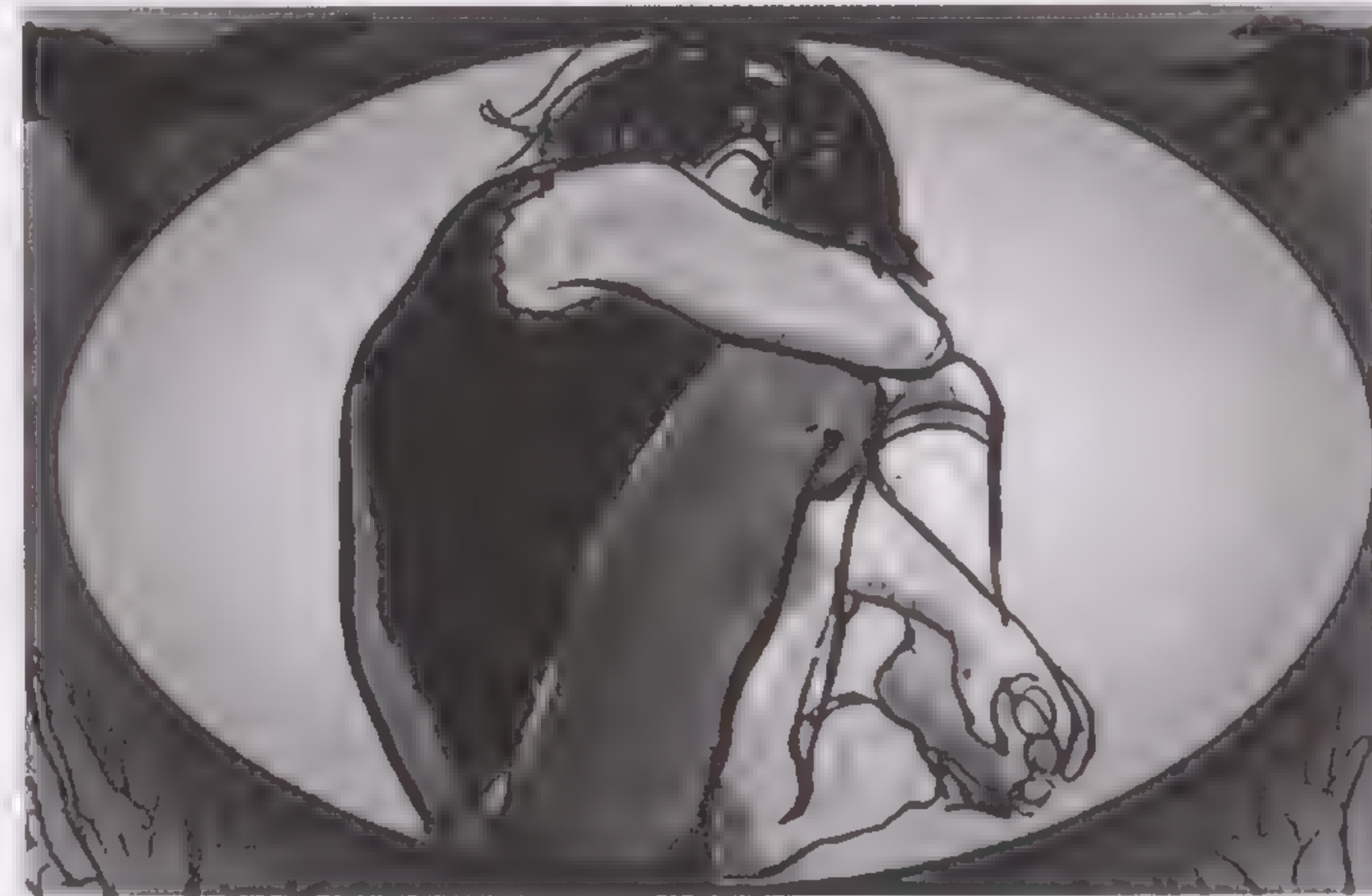
happened the first thing he did was ask me to take off my top. I kind of laughed, shook my head and said no. He asked again, I still said no. He kept asking, I thought that I could take my top t-shirt off, try to outwit him as I still had one on underneath. I did

this. He wasn't very happy about it, he said I was mean and had tricked him. I couldn't look at him. I couldn't even think properly. It was like having no mind, no brain, no power, nothing. He came over and took my second top off, tried to take my shorts off, couldn't do, made me lie down and pulled them until both the shorts and my underwear came off. I don't remember my bra being taken off but it must have happened at some stage. I just lay on the ground motionless; he started to use his mouth on me. I didn't do anything, didn't move, didn't speak, didn't look at him. I just kept my

eyes on the roof of the tent. I just wanted it over. I don't remember the order of events very well from there; I just remember events. He stopped using his mouth at some stage and sat up. I said the word protection, hoping this would give me some way to get out, something to fight with. He produced a condom, handed it to me. I held it and refused to put it on him. He took it off me, I had no idea whether he put it on or not. I tried so hard to block everything out. He lay on top of me and tried to penetrate me. It didn't work. It hurt so much. He grabbed my legs, putting them in the air and forced himself inside me. The pain was what I focussed on, that and the roof.

This was the only point I ever looked at his face. It felt like some sort of out of body experience. He finished -- I don't even know how long it went on. He lay beside me, trying to make me touch him. I tried to turn away. It was then I noticed he didn't have a condom on. After a period of time he asked if I

could stay with him. I said no, what about my friend? I have to go. He kept trying to persuade me, kept asking me. I tried to find my clothes. I



couldn't find my underwear. I asked him. He said he didn't know. It was a small tent, I knew they had to be somewhere but I wanted to leave as quick as possible, so I put the rest of my clothes on. I went to leave. He asked me for my phone number. I gave it to him. I just wanted to get away. When I got out of the tent I had no idea where I was going. It was pitch black. I felt so out of it, everything was a daze. I found a path, followed it, and found some toilets. In the light I could see the blood running down my legs, just running out of me. I left the toilets following the path, found where I knew, and got back to my tent. I don't know how or where to end this story, sorry.

drastic but I've been in and out of it all for 6 years now and I have decided to try and accept all

This is my rape, as I wrote it in 2008. I know it isn't very eloquent. It's the first time I have ever read what I'd written. It took me a year to report it. Even then at 18 and non-political I was aware of victim blaming. Nothing ever came of it. I can't give you any advice, nothing has worked for me. Just don't be ashamed. If you want to talk my email is gnarlypenguin@gmail.com

## 2 YEARS LATER...

Between writing this article and sending it to print, many things have happened in my life. As with anyone else some of these things fall into the 'good life event' category and some fall into the 'bad'. Of course life is not as simple as this, things never are but here is my go at updating you on my life.

the things that society considers wrong with me.

I am still depressed

I still get urges to cut myself

At times I still want to die

First things first, I have not been back in the psych ward since this article was written, to the majority of people I have been doing very well. I haven't cut myself in over a year and following this if you were to glance at my arms they could quite possibly look normal.

Also related to this (in what a lot of people disapprove of) I have given up on therapy, counselling, any form of psychiatric help. I know this seems quite



I guess I should say that I think I am getting better. Honestly I don't know. I do know that I rely a lot less on what people think of me, I am not afraid to fight, even if I am still afraid of the dark. I am not scared to speak out, I am still scared of crowds.

I have learned to navigate all these things, I know my limitations. No longer do I try to please everyone else by going places that I know I feel unsafe in. The world is a scary place, I just hope I can get through it.

-Suzanne-



**‘Non-Consensual Sex?’ - Originally published in ‘Loudmouth’ zine. Please note this article has been slightly edited by the author.**

This article comes with a trigger warning for sexual abuse, rape and any uncomfortable sexual experiences.

“I always felt kind of weird and uncomfortable about how I lost my virginity. There was something wrong with the whole situation that I never quite figured out until years after the event. I was seventeen and a virgin (I now think the whole concept of virginity is a bit odd, but, technically I’d never had sex which involved penetration.) I was bored at home and my friend Susan called me. Some old friends wanted to hang out with us, two guys we’d known for a few years but had lost touch with. I didn’t really want to go, but after a while she convinced me. I made no effort to look nice and brought nothing more than a few quid with me. I expected to be out maybe two hours tops. I’ll admit I was kind of weirdly excited to go out, because I’d been so locked inside my own head the past while, but I had no clue what lay ahead of me.

Things were a bit weird from the moment we started hanging out. There was a lot of booze and weed being offered to us. I was pretty depressed at the time so I said yes to a large pint of spirits. Whatever, I wanted to get drunk. I got pissed pretty fast. The night starts to get blurry here. We hopped the wall of some shit nightclub, I’m not sure I really wanted to go. My memory of being there is minimal. I remember my friend Thomas kissing me and telling me he couldn’t wait to get me to bed. I remember this making me feel really uncomfortable, which tends to happen when someone is pushing you beyond your sexual boundaries and experiences. (This sentence alone is a huge red flag. If sex has not been previously discussed, comfortably, by both parties, one should not assume its okay to say such a thing.) I had little grasp on what was going on, other than the fact that I was way too drunk. I was trying to have a good time, but I didn’t feel relaxed or safe, I was out of my depth.

We got back to the house and there was more kissing. My friend Susan was egging me on, “go on, get with him,” that sort of thing. I didn’t mind a bit of attention in my drunken state, but intercourse was not something I was even considering. The next thing I remember I was upstairs and I’m freaked out to realize one of my oldest friends is having sex with me. I knew we were making out in some kind of drunk and messy fashion, but intercourse was not what I had wanted to happen. I went into some weird shock. It just happened out of nowhere. One minute we were kissing and the next his penis was inside me. All I could manage to muster was “put on a condom.” Everything is a sad blur from here. I remember slightly sobering up and making an excuse that I needed water. When he left the room I put on all my clothes and pretended to be asleep. He came back in and said “hey, we’re not finished yet.” My stomach churned. I lay there and pretended to be asleep and I think he eventually dosed off.

The next morning I woke up and reality hit me like a sledgehammer. I grabbed my friend Susan and we left really fast. I remember feeling so ashamed and disgusting, I had my clothes on from last night my friend was still drunk. I got home. I was confused and scared and concerned I was pregnant. My whole body ached and I had bruises on my face and on my legs. There was some weird material inside me from the condom. I’d never seen this before, as I was a virgin previously. I remember writing in my diary “sex isn’t all its cracked up to be..” and crying on my bed for a number of hours. I told no one, other than Susan who had been there with me that night. I had no idea what was wrong, other than I thought it was my own fault and it had all been some horrible mistake on my part. This is not how someone should feel after having sexual intercourse for the first time, or any time.

It took me five years to realize that my friend had raped me.<sup>1</sup> The moment I realized everything made sense and I felt simultaneously relieved and devastated. I was relieved because I finally understood why it was so traumatic. I understood why I didn’t tell anyone, why I was so sad and why I lied about how I lost my virginity to my first proper sexual partner. I understood why I hid the bed sheets that were on my bed the day I got home. I understood why I destroyed all traces of that night ever happening. I understood why I begged my friend Susan not to tell anyone about that night. All these things became huge triggers. I became paranoid everyone knew, I tried to bury it away so I would never have to think about it. Yet, while this was happening in my head, never once did it occur to me it wasn’t my fault.



I felt completely insane for a long time after the event. The person who raped me made it worse by also decided to “fall in love” with me and harass me with texts asking me to meet up with him constantly. When my other female friends found out, (not from me, Thomas told his friend Damien, even though I had begged him not to tell anyone. Damien, being a bit of a gossip, then told all my friends the story on a night out when I wasn’t there..) they never considered it wrong, but something kind of funny and awkward. It became a kind of funny joke. “Ha, Thomas took Ann’s virginity, he didn’t know she was a virgin!” I brushed it off as this, just a weird experience. What else could I do? I had no tool to deal with what had actually happened. Pretending it was a big joke was just easier. This convinced me it was my fault and that I was in fact going completely mad.

A year or so later, when I told my first consensual sexual partner, he was sad for me, but again, never put two and two together and asked me was I raped.<sup>2</sup> I was crying out for attention in all the worst ways, knowing something was destroying me, but I couldn’t put my finger on it. I hated myself. It took an inner journey to finally realize and admit to myself. My friend, someone I trusted, raped me and harassed me and it’s not ok. I finally came to terms with this through reading about the experiences of others on feminist blogs. I always thought of rape by its more violent and horrific definitions, being attacked by a stranger and beaten and held down, etc. Only when I read about the experiences of others and learned about consent did things start to fall into place for me.

The reason I’m sharing this story is because from talking to friends about this, many of them have had shockingly similar experiences. It quickly became clear to me that rape isn’t just a brutal attack by a stranger down a dark alleyway as depicted in movies (I would like

<sup>1</sup> Definition of rape: According to Irish law, rape is a “common law offence, which is now governed by the Criminal Law (Rape) Act 1981. Rape under the 1981 Act is not gender neutral since it can only be carried out by a male on a female. Rape in this context refers to natural intercourse only as referred to in section 1(2) of the 1981 act which also clarifies that rape is complete on proof of penetration only. Section 2(1) of the Act outlines the offence of rape: (1) A man commits rape if (a) he has unlawful sexual intercourse with a woman who at the time of the intercourse does not consent to it, and (b) at that time he knows that she does not consent to the intercourse or he is reckless as to whether she does or does not consent to it” The Irish law is clearly outdated in its definition of rape, which is why I will also share the American definition, which I believe is much more up to date in its terminology. According to the US courts, rape is defined as sexual contact or penetration; without consent, with use of physical force, coercion, deception, threat, and/or when the victim is mentally incapacitated or impaired, physically impaired (due to voluntary or involuntary alcohol or drug consumption) asleep or unconscious.

<sup>2</sup> What is consent? Consent is a loud and clear “do you want to do \_\_\_\_\_ with me?” and a reply of “yes, I want to do this with you” when both parties are in their right minds. Silence is not deemed as consent. Body language is not deemed as consent. If a person wants to stop half way through, even if they have said yes previously, any further action is rape. Consent should be reaffirmed throughout the act.



to make it clear I am not in anyway claiming victims of brutal, violent rapes are in anyway to blame for speaking out and that these kind of rapes happen every day too) but a common occurrence more likely to be inflicted by people we know.<sup>3</sup>

If this story sounds familiar to you, maybe you too were raped. For a long time I was very afraid to say I was raped. Sometimes I still fear saying it. I feared people would call me an attention seeker or a liar or side with the rapist. In fact the first one or two people I told didn't really "get it" so don't be surprised if this happens.<sup>4</sup> Keep telling people you trust and don't let anyone tell you it was your fault or just a "weird" experience because you and I both know that's bullshit. It was only upon hearing the world's most comforting words.. **"me too.."** that I worked up the courage to confront what had happened to me. This opened up the floodgates of a lot of other nasty experiences of course, so make sure you have lots of friends and possibly family around you can trust to talk about these things. If that's not an option for you, perhaps consider talking to the Rape Crisis Center (number below.) I'm not saying once you admit this to yourself that all the problems surrounding it will go away, but you might find some peace of mind you been lacking for a long time.

I still don't have the guts to confront Thomas and I often find myself making excuses for him, even through all this soul searching. He obviously doesn't have a clue because he tried to add me on Facebook a while ago is if we were friends. I also heard that he'd been calling me "the one that got away" which makes me incredibly angry and disgusted. This is what happens because of rape culture. We're made to believe that it was somehow our fault and that the rapist didn't know or was led on.<sup>5</sup> Classic victim-blaming. I still haven't told my family or some friends and I probably never will. I just don't think they'd ever understand. What's important is I've come to terms what happened to me and I'm dealing with the harsh fact of the situation now. Thomas should never have assumed I wanted to sleep with him just because I was too intoxicated to make a proper decision. He didn't even give me the option. I didn't even have the chance to say "no." Consent should always be discussed before action takes place. Consent is complicated and so are people's boundaries. Never assume someone is comfortable with something just because you are. Never assume sex has been decided unless you discuss this openly with the other person first.

If this has happened to you, I encourage you to speak out, to talk to feminists you trust about what happened and to write about it and not let it ruin your sex life, like it did mine for a long time. Take control, accept what happened and fight back. Speak out about slut-shaming, victim-blaming and rape culture so we can lessen the chances of this happening to so many of us in the future and remember. IT WASN'T YOUR FAULT and it NEVER will be. Stay strong."<sup>6</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Media portrayal of rape: Though there are many different ways in which rape can occur, the most common media portrayal of rape is by a shady looking stranger who violently attacks and rapes a woman, often in a dark alley or somewhere outdoors. This portrayal of rape is damaging, as 90% of rapes are inflicted by a person known to the victim (according to the Rape Crisis Network Ireland).

<sup>4</sup> If someone tells you a story like this, be very careful not to brush off their experience as something minor. A person sharing this type of information with another is a clear cry for help. It is not attention seeking or dramatic. If someone reveals to you they think they may have been raped, you should listen and try to understand. Avoid too many questions and be there for them as best you can. Coming to terms with being raped is very confusing and painful and the wrong words can set a person back in their process of recovery. Questions like "Are you sure?" "What were you wearing?" "Did you provoke him/her?" are never helpful. If you think you aren't the right person to counsel them through the trauma of their experience, point them towards someone who can.

<sup>5</sup> If you're reading this and feel you may have had sex or a sexual experience with someone who did not give their consent, or where the consent was unclear, I encourage you to do some further reading on consent, rape and being called out and how to handle it. Please see the links at the end of the article.

<sup>6</sup> When discussing this article amongst some circles, I've been told of the "seriousness" of accusing someone of rape and the possibility of me ruining someone's life, etc. This kind of dialogue was confusing and hurtful to me and sent me into a spiral of shame and fear, while the rapist went on protected, blissfully unaware of his actions. This kind of rhetoric ensures this kind of rape, the kind not often portrayed in the media, is left undiscussed and normalized. Rape is sex without consent and that is what happened that night. This is fact. As discussed in the article 'Nice Guys Commit Rape Too' we find, "More often than not, rape happens amongst people who know each other, and the rapist is not someone carrying a villainous cloak and look of ill intent. The rapist is just a person who may genuinely not realize that what he's doing is rape."

#### Resources and Links:

- Dublin Rape Crisis Centre: <http://www.drcc.ie>
- Rape Crisis Network Ireland: <http://www.rcni.ie>
- Irish Law on Rape and Sexual Assault: <http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/SexualOffencesLawPaper.pdf/Files/SexualOffencesLawPaper.pdf>
- Criminal Law Rape Act 1990: <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/1990/en/act/pub/0032/index.html>
- Learning Good Consent, a practical resource for everyone to learn more about good consent and how to apply it: <http://www.phillyspissed.net/node/32>
- Men Unlearning Rape, a resource which shows how men are taught from a young age to treat women as sexual prey: [www.phillyspissed.net/sites/default/files/menunlearningrape.pdf](http://www.phillyspissed.net/sites/default/files/menunlearningrape.pdf)
- Nice Guys Commit Rape Too, a helpful article questioning the roles men and women play in rape culture and how we must unlearn this behavior: <http://www.xojane.com/issues/nice-guys-commit-rape-too>





# Fat and Bones

**Trigger warning:** This article discusses Anorexia, Bulimia and Binge Eating Disorder. Some readers may find this upsetting.

I have been threatening to write this article for about four years now. The problem is that every time I try something has changed, my perspective, my health, my attitude, how I feel about my body.

But here goes.

I have Bulimia. I am Bulimic with Anorexic leanings. I have had an eating disorder since I can remember, since I was a child. My earliest memories are from around seven years old, when I wouldn't eat my lunch from school. I'd keep it and hide behind my wardrobe or throw it in the bushes when I'd come home. When I was getting my room redecorated my father found all the old fruit and sandwiches and I don't remember being scolded. But I remember being mortified.

My next memory is being twelve and writing fake notes from my father saying I could leave the school grounds to go to the local shop to buy my lunch with money I'd stolen from my grandfather. Buying bags of crisps and bars of chocolate and eating them quickly before I went back.

After this I'm thirteen and in first year in secondary school, suddenly very aware of my body and feeling a hot embarrassment. I remember wearing baggy t-shirts and hating P.E. I remember being called fat by three boys in my year. I wasn't fat.

Skip forward two years and I'm fifteen, its summer holidays and I'm on a diet, I remember eating only pineapples and cornflakes. I remember doing 500 sit-ups a day and walking for hours and hours. I remember going back to school with my new highlighted hair and new super skinny physique and getting compliments, I remember getting attention from the boys. It felt great. My hipbones protruded, for the first time I could see all my ribs. I loved it. I'd suck in constantly and rub my belly to make sure the sit-ups were working. I starved myself and obsessively exercised in secret for around a year.

I'm sixteen now and working in and bed and breakfast outside the town. I can't remember the first time or where the idea came from but I found myself bent over a toilet with my hands in my mouth. Anytime I ate I went to the toilet, stuck my fingers down my throat and vomited up what would come out.

It's been the same ever since. Even now about three years into my recovery the thoughts are still constant. I binge and purge when I'm stressed. Even sometimes when I'm not. Something as simple and instinctual as feeding myself is so difficult. After I vomit I get a dopamine rush which calms me for a shortwhile. I'm addicted to it.

I can puke when and where I want and you won't even know. The pub, a restaurant, your house. I have had longterm serious relationships, lived with partners and kept my secret. I can do it in under the time it takes you to pee. I'll be out, back at the table smiling and you won't even realise.

To go into details of how I got away with these behaviours would take a whole magazine to explain. Bulimia is a very painful, secretive disease, and keeping this secret was my life. Its twelve years later. I'm still a healthy looking size eight with a little belly. And I'm still a Bulimic with Anorexic leanings. I went through two and a half years of therapy which ended a year ago and I'm a very happy woman these days. I'm in recovery, no one can say how long this will take, I have regular relapses. But I do my best to eat and exercise for health and happiness.

The next section of this article is an account of what a day can go like for me when I'm particularly bad. My purges are all based at home here but as I mentioned above it can happen anywhere. The account is in diary form. For people suffering with any of these issues, keeping a diary can help you understand and behaviours and habits you may have formed. Looking back over can make it easier to understand what could have led you to a binge, a purge or both. Readers may find the next section of this article triggering.

10am

Wake up, look down at my belly, hold it in. Get up and go downstairs resolving to starve myself and exercise today after the binge purge session I had last night. I go to the toilet and check my side profile to see if I'm fat or skinny today. I'm never skinny. I squeeze the soft bit at my middle and make a face at it. I squeeze the soft bits at my back. They're the worst. Suck in. I hate my body. I'll drink a tea and pick on something that I saw in the fridge when getting the milk without even noticing. Fuck!! I broke it now.

10.30am

Fuck it I'll have breakfast, I'll be healthy, I'll eat slowly, I'll work it off, it's ok. I won't eat again.

10.45am

I'm standing at the counter, I've just eaten two slices of bread with whatever I could find, just one more. I'll exercise after and I won't eat.

11am

I've had four slices of bread, I've done it now so I'll have a big bowl of cereal. I have to be full. There's no point other-

ise. My figure is gross. I eat fast. I barely chew I just swallow. Mechanical and blank swallow as much as I can.

11.15am

I've just been sick, bread is hard to get up, it comes in big lumps and it hurts my throat. It takes effort and a lot of retching to get going. I'm making tea and putting on more toast now, swallowing at the acid in the back of my mouth. I'll go back and check my side profile to see how fat I look. Fat.

12.30pm

Dress in baggy clothes after changing between five and ten times. Suck in. I look fat in everything. I'm bloated after my binge and my throat is still scratchy. Nothing fits me properly because I'm constantly bloated and uncomfortable from over eating and puking, my body never knows what's going on. Manage to leave the house eventually go get coffee, I'll get a croissant as well, suck in while you're ordering, don't hold your arms against your side cause they'll look fat, don't look down you'll get a



double chin. Suck in, I'll go for a cycle later and I won't eat after this. I'll just get an avocado as well and some hummus, it looks so nice, its healthy it's ok. I won't eat again today. I stuff the croissant into my mouth and its gone in less than a minute and I'm feeling guilty.

**5pm**

I'm back home. I've had two more coffees and I'm edgy. I'm also starving which makes it worse. I'm tired. I've spent those last hours catching myself in shop windows, pushing bulges back underneath restrictive clothing, tugging at my oversized jumper, pulling, adjusting, fixing, obsessing. Keep it all in. I'm tired from tensing my belly all day, sitting up straight. I even suck in when I'm cycling. I'm tired from telling myself I'm fat. I'm tired from the constant comparing myself to women on the street. You're fat be skinny like her, she's fat I'm skinnier than her, you're fat why can't you just starve yourself. Just fucking starve yourself. You're not even good enough to be Anorexic. Calories, grams of fat, sugar, starch, vitamins, exercise, starve, exercise, starve, starve. I'm tired from constant thoughts of food. What did I eat, when did I eat it, How much did I eat, I want to eat that, don't eat that, control yourself, ah just have it, get it up get it up. Fat fat fat. I go upstairs and change my clothes several times. I do this a lot. Sometimes I can't find anything I feel comfortable in so I can't leave the house and I get very distressed. Then I binge. Don't eat. You're fat. Don't eat. Don't eat. I'm starving. Don't eat. You're fat. You're fat. I'm starving. Make dinner. I'll make dinner for everyone. You're gross. Suck in. Your clothes don't fit you. Why can't you just starve yourself.

**6.30pm**

I've just eaten dinner, I ate really fast, I ate a portion much too big for myself, enough for two. I feel full and bloated and disgusting. It's hard to breathe. Go to the toilet, get sick. It only takes a minute. Got about half of it up maybe, gotta be faster. Gotta get there before it gets too far down. Can't go straight away they'll know. Red eyes, smiling, sit down. Pick at what's left, say how full you are. You're gross, you're so fat. Shift in the chair and suck in so you look less fat. Suck in. Sit straight. Don't put your legs flat against the chair they look huge. Cross them, feet on tiptoes. Must be skinny. Arms away from sides, shoulders

forward. What can I eat next? Don't eat you pig. Pick at what's left. I won't eat anymore after this.

**8.30pm**

I've been obsessing about sweets for an hour. I go to the shop to get a snack for watching a movie. You've ruined today anyway so just get what you want. Five bags of crisps, two bars of chocolate some bread and cheese. I eat two bags on the walk home which takes less than three minutes. I hide what I've bought and go straight upstairs to leave it there. I go make tea and pick at some leftovers and put on some toast. I've started again so there's no point in eating a little. I have to eat enough so it's hard to breathe. I stuff two slices of toast with huge bits of cheese and loads of butter into my mouth and swallow them with my tea, not much chewing and definitely no tasting. Not full enough yet so it's upstairs to eat what I bought. I stuff everything brainlessly into my mouth. I have to be fast and I have to be full. I'm in a trance. Immediately after I'm done I move to the toilet, shove your fingers in get the food out, i can taste all of it, all the different things I've eaten, and it's sweet from the chocolate and warm from the tea. Seconds after I got it in there. I push till I can't get anymore out. Wipe my eyes, clear my throat. Look in the mirror, smile. Disgust. Check my side profile. The belly is the worst. I'm gross. I'll starve myself now.

**10.30pm**

I'm stoned and I want more snacks, I've fucked everything up anyway. I'll starve myself tomorrow. I have an overwhelming sense of disappointment and disgust in myself. Vomiting makes me feel calm for a minute and after I always hope that I can starve myself so it won't happen again. That I can control my urges. Without registering what I'm doing I find myself in the kitchen looking at the contents of the fridge. I'm mindless. I'm really bloated and full and tired from all the carbohydrates starch and sugar. I eat more toast and some leftovers. I find some biscuits and I eat about ten of them, one after another with no break. I can't do a huge binge again so I settle at that. I'm at the toilet bowl. It should be revolting having my face this close to where people shit

but I'm used to it, it comforts me. My friend the toilet. My throat is very sore now and my glands are a bit swollen. I do it anyway. My throat is scratchy for a long time after it. Look in the mirror, prod the bits I hate, squeeze them, suck in. Bend in ways to reveal the outline of bones, collar bone. Chest bone. Ribs. I suck in so much it hurts my insides.

**11pm**

I'm back in bed with more tea. I will get up early and go for a cycle, a run, I'll do my stretches and sit ups and I'll go to yoga this week. I watch something to distract myself. I fall asleep. It starts all over again when I wake up.

The term 'eating disorder' refers to a complex, potentially life-threatening condition, characterised by severe disturbances in eating behaviours.

Eating disorders can be seen as a way of coping with emotional distress, or as a symptom of underlying issues

**Eating disorders are not primarily about food**

**People can and do recover**

**Eating disorders can affect anyone**

Eating disorders are characterised by a variety of disordered eating behaviours such as:

**Self-starvation** - by fasting and/or food restriction

**Purging** - by self-induced vomiting, over-exercising, or laxative abuse

**Bingeing** - by consuming quantities of food beyond what the body needs to satisfy hunger

An eating disorder can be very destructive, both physically and emotionally, and people can get trapped into the destructive cycle of the eating disorder without knowing how to cope with it.

An eating disorder is not just about food and weight, but also about a persons sense of who they are.

Treatment of an eating disorder will require attention to both the physical and the psychological/emotional aspects of the person. Treatment must always include respect for and sensitivity for the overall well-being of the person.

The distress of a person experiencing an eating disorder, whether or not it is acknowledged, may have a considerable impact on family and friends.

I could'nt make this article fluffy and upbeat. It was painful to write and as much as I want to I cant offer a magical solution. But I can tell, there is help out there, it is possible to recover and you don't need to feel alone.

All the information cited above was taken from **Bodywhys.ie**

Bodywhys offers several support options to family, friends, partners and those suffering from and eating disorder. You can find all of these on their webpage or by calling the lo-call number below.

1 890 200 444



## The Main Eating Disorders

### Anorexia Nervosa

- ⊙ They will be preoccupied with thoughts of food and the need to lose weight.
- ⊙ They may exercise excessively and may engage in purging behaviours.
- ⊙ A person will make determined efforts to attain and maintain a body weight lower than the normal body weight for their age, sex and height.

### Bulimia Nervosa

- ⊙ A person will make determined efforts to purge themselves of any food eaten, sometimes following a binge, and often following 'normal' food intake.
- ⊙ They will engage in high-risk behaviours that can include fasting, excessive exercising, self-induced vomiting, and/or the misuse of laxatives, diuretics or other medications.
- ⊙ They may maintain a body weight within the normal range of their age, sex and height. As a result, bulimia is often less obvious than anorexia and can go unnoticed for longer.

### Binge Eating Disorder

- ⊙ A person will engage in repeated episodes of bingeing without purging.
- ⊙ They will likely gain considerable amounts of weight over time.
- ⊙ They find themselves trapped in a cycle of dieting, bingeing, self-recrimination and self-loathing.

**Just because somebody doesn't fit in absolutely with one particular category doesn't mean they don't have an eating disorder. A large number of people with eating disorders don't fit strictly into one category but fluctuate between the three.**

### People experiencing an eating disorder may

- ⊙ Have dieted.
- ⊙ Have low self-esteem though this may not be obvious, as people who develop eating disorders are often 'high achievers'.
- ⊙ Show a marked over-concern with body shape, weight and size, and an obsession with food.
- ⊙ See thinness as a magical solution to problems, while weight gain is feared.
- ⊙ Have difficulty identifying and expressing their real needs.
- ⊙ View their body as larger than it actually is (distorted body image).
- ⊙ Have problems around control.
- ⊙ Find it hard to talk about their feelings and to deal with conflict.
- ⊙ Be depressed and may become isolated.
- ⊙ Experience mood swings.



# HOW I BEAT DEPRESSION

words by Angela  
Marina (waiting for auld lang syne)

I first learned how to depress when I was 12 years old. Twelve is an awkward age, and I was an awkward kid. I made friends but didn't quite fit in. I constantly wanted to be thinner, smarter, better. Pretty typical, I guess. But by 14 I didn't just feel out of place; I began to actively think about killing myself. At age 16, I started to write good bye letters to friends and family. I just really didn't like my life and suicide felt like a solution. Things more or less continued down that path, through college (which took me six years), grad school, my first marriage (which didn't last), my parents' divorce, and subsequent relationships. Years of ups and downs, but mostly downs. Sometimes I could be found walking down the street, sobbing and talking to myself, yes, like a crazy person. Because I was crazy. I spent countless hours in therapy. Over the span of ten years, I took every available selective serotonin reuptake inhibitor (SSRI) class antidepressant on the market but none. I tried yoga. I tried having lots of sex. I tried journaling. I tried drinking. I tried not drinking. I tried smoking pot. I dropped out of college. I went back to college. I went to graduate school. I moved, several times. I changed jobs, a bunch of times. I went back to school again. But depression always found me. I thought of it as a disease that I couldn't shake. I didn't know what a healthy relationship looked like, or what healthy boundaries were. I felt a deep weariness, like my life was a long journey to and from nowhere.

Don't get me wrong, I had my good days. I had days where I knew what I was doing and I felt confident that I was on some kind of ok path, and that I was inherently good. But when the voices bore down, they bore down HARD. They lectured me about what I should have done years ago, what I should be doing in the present, how I was unkind, selfish, negligent, ugly, dirty, wholly deserving of every bad thing that had happened or will happen, old, haggard, unfashionable, lazy, stupid, and cruel. They had amazing logic, apparently, because I believed every word. I tried to work out exactly when and how I had come to be this way. Sadly, the answer to the former was always. I had always hurt myself. I'd

always felt that I didn't truly deserve love and happiness. I accused every romantic partner of not loving me, no matter what they said or did. I hated myself spectacularly.

I wrote, "So what do you do when you are 32 years old and you can look at this evidence objectively, intelligently, and see how it all works, but you cannot change yourself? I can repeat affirmations until doomsday but will I ever believe them? How can I when the other voices are still so strong? Sometimes I have these moments when I know. The clouds separate and I feel it, really feel it. But the clouds always come back. I try to take a different route. But I always end up back at the same place. And I realize each time that I drove myself there." I'd been diagnosed with clinical depression, obsessive compulsive disorder, impulse control disorder, social anxiety disorder, and general anxiety disorder. Despite the fact that I was fulfilling a lifelong dream of studying fashion design and I had a loving family, I decided I'd had enough of the ups and downs. I wanted to die.

I tied a knot in the end of one of my boyfriend's belts, and closed it into the top of a door, using the buckle to form a loop. As I hung by the neck from the doorframe, it surprised me how quickly I started to lose consciousness. I started to feel tingly all over and my vision grew dim. I thought of my mother and father, who'd done nothing but love and support me my entire life, and how I'd be ruining their lives forever. For some reason, that reality never occurred to me before. I realised that if I were making a mistake, I



needed to figure it out fast because I wouldn't be conscious for much longer. So with my remaining strength, my legs found the chair I'd stepped off, and I released myself. My neck was covered with broken blood vessels, and, to my disgust, so was the skin all around my eyes. I was alone living in a new city. I didn't know what to do or who to turn to, so I smoked a bunch of weed and cried myself to sleep.

In the morning, I had to face the fact that his thing I had pinned all my hopes on, my one final comfort when life felt unbearable – putting myself out of my misery – was no longer an option. I knew that I would never and could never do that to my family. I decided then and there that if I wasn't going to die, I'd better figure out how to live. Of course I'd always wanted to be happy, but I was never motivated to figure out how. This next bit is going to sound cheesy: That's when I read a self-help book.

Now, I'd already read a million self help books – too many to even name here. Loads! But this one had a different message. It was called "Choice Theory: A New Psychology of Personal Freedom" by a psychiatrist, William Glasser. Some of the ideas in the book were hard to swallow because they completely opposed what I was told about my mental illness(es) and how I self-identified: as a person with an illness that I couldn't control. I thought that depression just "happened" to me. The doctors had explained to me that it was "clinical," after all. Chemical imbalance in the brain! Serotonin! I had become familiar with all the buzzwords. But what came first, the depression or the wacko brain chemistry? Once I started to question whether I actively chose a life with depression and alienation through my behavior, I felt like there was finally hope that didn't come in a prescription bottle. The concept of Choice Theory is basically the idea that some mental illnesses (and indeed some physical ones) are the result of our creative attempts to control the things we can't control. When I was depressing, I often spoke in terms that I "can't" do this or that because I was too depressed, upset, anxious, etc. I often blamed being under-medicated. But when I thought about it, 99.9% of the time, I actually could have, but I chose not to. No one was holding a gun to my head saying they'll shoot if I didn't go to work or school. In other words, there was nothing physically wrong with me. I was mentally ill. But like a lot of physical illnesses, you can cure yourself through changing your behaviors.

It didn't feel like a choice to have the frustrated/sad/angry emotions I felt, but in an indirect way, it was. I chose the outcome of depression through my behaviors. When you're having trouble, if you want

to get out of it, you really only have the following choices: 1. Change what you want, 2. Change what you're doing, or 3. Change both. Up until then, I had been completely stuck in the same old patterns of trying to control the people close to me, and hating myself when they didn't respond the way I wanted them to. There's a lot in life we can't control. But the rest is up to us.

I often think of it as a switch that went on in my brain as I learned how to change my behavior. But actually, it was a very gradual process. I wasn't miserable for 20 years on purpose. But in retrospect I used being a victim of depression to exert control where I really had none. Unfortunately, all depression did was ensure that I didn't get what I wanted. I used depression to express my emotions for me because no one could question or deny it. I also used depression to express anger, to passively ask for help from those around me, or to avoid the problems that I felt bad about. It wasn't me to blame; it was "my depression." So while I didn't choose my misery, I chose the behaviors that led me there. My relationships were fraught with martyrdom and selfishness in turns. I gave everything, then I flipped my lid when I didn't get what I wanted in return. I knew that's what I was doing, but felt powerless to change because I thought I had an incurable affliction. But realising that I didn't have to think of it as a disease gave me the autonomy and the power to learn how to be a happy person.

The first big change I made was, frankly, to act like a sane person. I had a long history of insanity, which at times even included taking anti-psychotic medication. But I taught myself how to pause just before I did something "crazy" and ask myself WWASPD (What Would A Sane Person Do)? Then I would do that. I learned to cut the dramatic gestures I usually favoured. Instead of locking myself in the bathroom and cutting myself, or throwing something at my partner, I tried to calmly explain to him that the way he treated me was disrespectful and unacceptable. Instead of staying in bed feeling sorry for myself when I was feeling insecure and useless, I rang a friend to see if she wanted to go for a walk. Rather than think about how nothing in my life ever went the way I wanted it to, I did the dishes. Yes, even something simple like doing the dishes helped me feel less sad! Even if I went back to feeling low, which I often did in those early days, I knew that there were things I could do to make me feel nice in the short term. If I felt good for a half hour while I talked to a friend or relative on the phone, that was 30 minutes of depression-free life, which I was thankful for. 30 minutes turned into hours, hours into days,

and so on.

I have to pause here and say that the message of this article isn't, "Pull yourself up by your bootstraps and get over it," because I know it doesn't work like that, at least not for me. And I also realise that this isn't a cure to magically change sad emotions to happy ones. Of course we don't have direct control over our emotions. But I think we don't give enough credence to the indirect control that we do have through the things we do. The idea is that I had to jump start myself: since I have direct control over my actions, then I try to do things that I know, if I follow them to their logical conclusion, will help me. The key, for me, is that I really do have to think them through to the end of the story. If I think, "I'm upset so I'll drink this bottle of whiskey to feel better," I have to think, then, about what's really going to happen. If I think, "I'm going to post on the internet how so and so did such and such to me," I have to think of the consequences and how it will really play out. (I'll tell you how: not good.) Sticking to things that I absolutely knew were good for me was essential. Go for a run, read my favorite book, watch a comedy, call a friend who makes me laugh, clean my bedroom – simple things, small things. No life re-haul required.

Drugs can help in the short term. But, for me, I was never not depressed while on antidepressants or not psychotic when on anti-psychotics. (And I haven't even mentioned the awful side effects some of them had.) Sure, they'd help for a while, but I always managed to bring it back. And talk therapy? I talked until the cows came home. Telling a stranger about how the kids in school called me "Chunk" never seemed to have any healing powers. The real solution to my mental problems happened when I learned how to relate to other people, especially those close to me. Psychiatric medications don't cause real happiness, but healthy relationships with other human beings do. When we love others and feel truly loved, it's much more difficult to depress. Here's the most important thing I discovered: When I was depressing, I thought that if someone (or even society, the media, etc) criticised me or was angry at me, it was the truth. It's like when a phone rings: I thought I had to pick it up! I didn't realise I could actually not answer. I learned to separate other people's opinions from my own self-worth. The negative voices became more and more faint until I began to notice that I actually liked myself. The people I was drawn to became more positive. The life I led became more fulfilling. I began to feel happiness constantly.

The panicking, depressing, psychosing, and obsessing were reactions to my fears. I often thought, as with depression, that these are things

that happened to me that were beyond my control, and therefore I had no choice for happiness. But this harmful assumption revoked my personal power and freedom, not to mention my happiness. As long as I bought into the fact that there wasn't anything I could do about it, I felt helpless to end my suffering. I won't say that it was easy to teach myself how to stop trying to control my life and everyone around me with my mental illness, since it's the only thing I ever knew. It was hard to consider I could cure myself of something as serious as psychosis. But once I began to see choices in even the most dire circumstances, I could regain real control over my life, or at least over me, which is the only person we really have control over anyways.

Of course, some pretty awful things happened to me that were indeed beyond my control. That's life. For example, I was assaulted. Twice. I was homeless for three months. I moved to a new country where I didn't know anyone but my partner. My father died. But throughout it all, I never went back to depressing. I continue to do things that have a greater chance of bringing me happiness, and moving on when I occasionally mess up. Just the other day I was feeling a bit low and I crawled into bed. I wanted to stay there all day. But I thought about what was bothering me, and whether staying in bed all day would help or hurt my problem. Then I thought about what I could do that would most likely help my situation (WWASPD), and was then motivated to get up and do it, and I was glad I did.

A therapist once told me that I'd have depression for life, and that it is a lifelong illness that a person can never escape from. It's easy to feel compelled to listen to so-called experts in the medical industry, especially when they offer you drugs claiming to be cures. There are some anarchist critiques of the whole concept of mental illness, and the idea that depression is actually a response to conditions under capitalism resonates with me. But that's an article for another day! For now, I've been living depression-free for seven years, and in fact I've never been happier. People who didn't know me before look puzzled when I tell them I once tried to hang myself. Can anyone cure themselves like I did? Sadly, no. But if you believe no solution to a problem exists, you stop looking for one. I am proof that mental illness doesn't have to be an incurable disease and you may not need therapy or drugs to get yourself out of it.

If you're depressed, reach out to someone! Here are three great resources for depression:

[www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org)

[www.aware.ie](http://www.aware.ie)

[www.headstrong.ie](http://www.headstrong.ie)



# An Ambivalent Relationship With High Heels...

words by Eve



I've got 54321/ I've got a red pair of high-heels on/ Tumble me over, it doesn't take much./ Tumble me over, tumble me, push./ In my red high-heels I've no control/ The rituals of repression are so old/ You can do what you like, there'll be no reprisal/ I'm yours, yes I'm yours, it's my means of survival.

-CRASS

When I was a teenager and was attacked by a homophobic bigot outside a nightclub, I was being kicked in the head... a woman I didn't know whacked him over the head with the steel-reinforced high heel of her shoe. He ran off screaming, and she and I became friends.

-Paul

Please describe your ideal pair of heels: "They are white and shimmering. They might be mistaken for a mist. When I walk they spell out U-T-O-P-I-A. They make my feet feel like butter."

-Rag Survey 2013



This is not one of those articles discussing whether or not feminists can or should wear high heels: the whole point of feminism is that that you get to wear whatever the hell you want. Rather, it is a cultural exploration/reflection of the phenomenon of heels.

I have an ambivalent relationship with high heels. Being both a dyke and an archaeologist has resulted in my wardrobe largely consisting of checked shirts, woollen jumpers and mud encrusted rain gear. But I do, occasionally, like to get 'dressed up', and when I do, my aesthetic is drag queenesque: slutty charity shop dresses, red lipstick and too much black eye make-up, naturally set off by a pair of delicious heels.

My favourite pair: black suede peep toes with a 6-inch black patent heel. I lovingly don them, admiring myself endlessly in the bathroom mirror and delighting in the way I can shimmy all-the-way-down-to-the-ground. I feel tall (my 5' 8" frame extended to over 6 foot) and all powerful: arse out, shoulders back, ready to take the night. And then, I try to walk. The first few meters are fine, the next manageable, but before I am at the end of my road I am reduced to a cripple, hobbling gracelessly towards my destination.

See, I like the way heels look. I like posing. I like strutting across my bedroom and arranging myself artfully on the couch. But really, when it comes down to it, I want to move. I want to jump and flail and shimmy for hours on end and high heels crucify my feet. Wearing them makes me feel like I have been fitted with a medieval torture device. So usually, after all the posing in my bedroom, I think fuck it, throw on a pair of gutties and hit the dance floor.

I've been occasionally lured into forking out for delightful heels that have proved utterly unwearable (the towering purple velvet wedge peep-toes spring to mind, or the pea green mary janes that left me in pain for a whole week after wearing them to my graduation). And, I've often wondered is it just me? Do I possess unusually sensitive feet, or do the legions of women done up to the nines of a Dublin weekend feel similar agony but carry on smiling through the stabbing pain? I

smugly note the knots of drunken women padding in stocking feet along George's Street at 3am, heels in hand, congratulating myself on my sensible footwear choice. I look at my sister's stack of heels: candy pink open toes, plum ankle boots, black patent pointies, green velvet strappies and think that high heels are a surrealist joke. I mean, what is the point of a piece of footwear that actually impedes your mobility?

Some would say that it is this very impeded mobility that lies behind the attraction of the heel, as Crass's 'Bata Motel' tune lays down. Does high-heel-wearing women's attractiveness to men, like the bound feet of aristocratic women in imperial China, lie in their very vulnerability and lack of control?

There are other theories though. For one, heels give you tits and ass. Heels are thought to tilt the pelvis of the wearer, thrusting out the buttocks and arching the lumbar spine into a mammalian sexual pose known as 'lordosis'. Thus, wearing heels is a signal of sexual availability on the part of the wearer. In a similar vein they change the way you walk. A study published in 2012 (yes, someone did a study) found that 'wearing high heels led to increased femininity of gait including reduced stride length and increased rotation and tilt of the hips', and the authors concluded 'that high heels exaggerate sex specific aspects of female gait and women walking in high heels could be regarded as a supernormal stimulus'.<sup>1</sup> According to the authors, In the same way that 'female baboons with a larger than normal swelling of the bottom associated with the sexually receptive period of their cycle, arouse greater sexual interest in males. High heels similarly exaggerate the sex-specific aspects of the female walk which could cause sexual arousal in males.'<sup>2</sup>

1 High heels as supernormal stimuli: How wearing high heels affects judgements of female attractiveness. Paul H. Morris, Jenny White, Edward R. Morrison, Kayleigh Fisher in Evolution & Human Behavior - May 2013 (Vol. 34, Issue 3, Pages 176-181, DOI: 10.1016/j.evolhumbehav.2012.11.006)

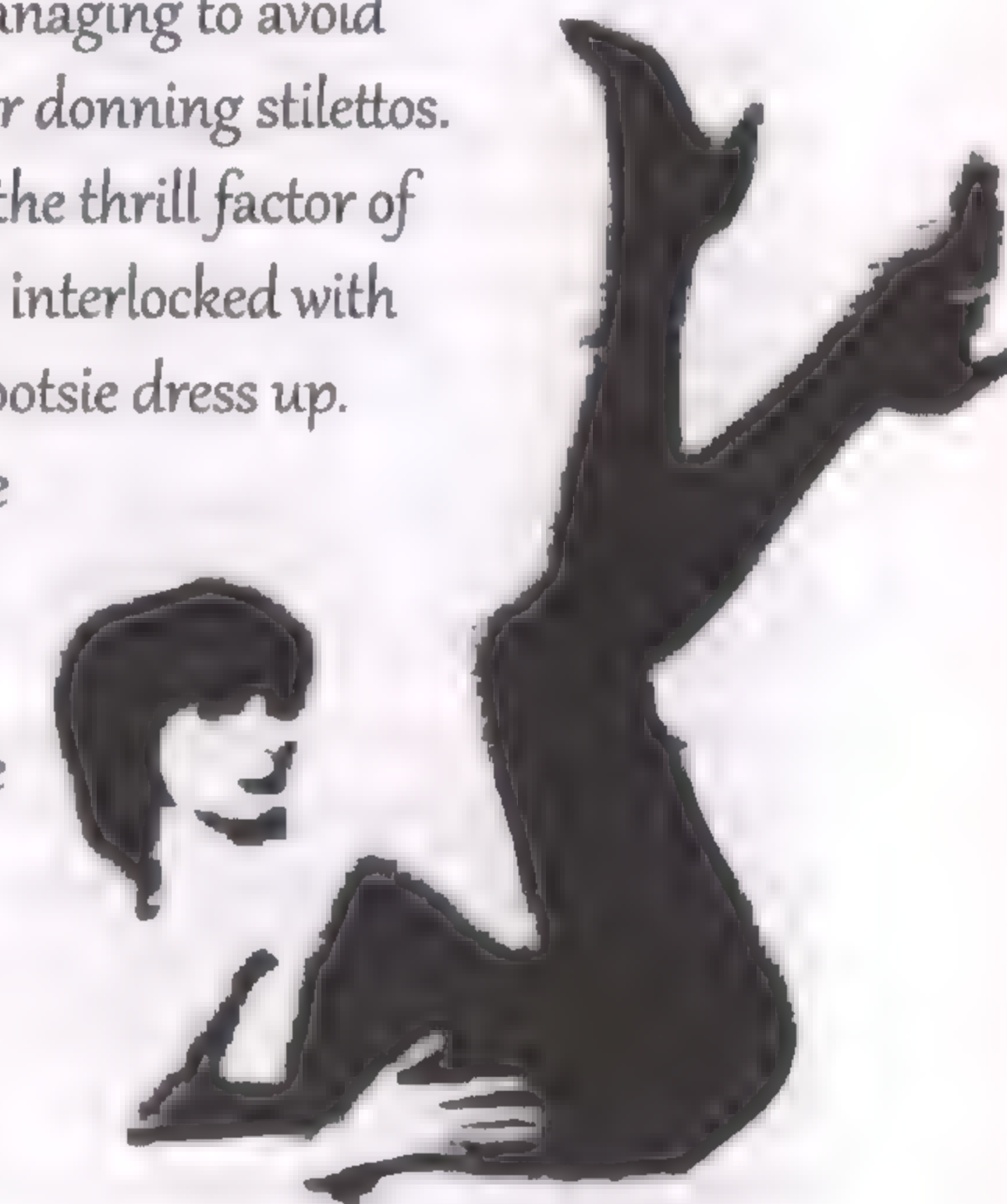
2 [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/dr-raj-persaud/why-do-high-heels\\_b\\_3691829.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/dr-raj-persaud/why-do-high-heels_b_3691829.html)

All the research pointing to heels' role in accentuating female sexuality is rather funny given the footwear's history and development. Heels originated as riding footwear in the near east, where the elongated shoe heel served to anchor the rider's foot in a stirrup. During the 17<sup>th</sup> century 'Persian style shoes were enthusiastically adopted by [male European] aristocrats, who sought to give their appearance a virile, masculine edge that, it suddenly seemed, only heeled shoes could supply.'

In the pursuit of this article I decided to do a little survey about the public's heel wearing habits. It is, I will admit, not exactly a paragon of methodological rigour. I knocked the survey together in about 10 minutes, during a bout of enthusiasm and mid way thought my second glass of wine one evening. It was a carelessness that I soon regretted when exactly 199 people took the survey. I drew it up using survey monkey and solicited participants on facepuck through various friends and groups. The cross section of respondents is thus, clearly biased, as a lot of my mates are anarchists/feminists/queers/archaeologists. There were no bombshells.

Even though I worded it in (what I thought) was a gender neutral way, the respondents overwhelmingly identified as female. In terms of heels being 'a tool of the patriarchy' (as I say, I had had a glass or two of wine when I drew up the questions) the respondents were more or less evenly split.

When it comes to heels, for me, it's the tension between image and reality. The glamour and excitement of the shoe and the delicious notions they inspire counterpoised with the embodied experience of trying to walk in the fuckers. This seems to carry through in my survey, only a very few hardcore enthusiasts wear heels everyday, with the majority increasing their height for weddings, socialising and fancy dress. Most people seem to manage impressive stiltwalking, lengthening and sexifying their legs striding elegantly and effortlessly into any situation. Disappointingly only a mere ten per cent of the people surveyed, like myself, find the ordeal and trauma of heel wearing completely overwhelming. The majority did opt for between 'kind of uncomfortable' and 'very uncomfortable.' That said, an impressive 30 percent were very happy in heels, finding the feat a doable, enjoyable endeavour and, managing to avoid looking like a donkey on a dancefloor donning stilettos. Of those that manage to wear heels, the thrill factor of seeing the world from a new angle is interlocked with a myriad other reasons for playing footsie dress up. Below are some of the reasons people gave for wearing high heels, as for me, I'll keep dreaming of a pair of elegant, sexy heels I can wear outside my bedroom and shake my ass all night on the dancefloor in.



"I feel sexier in them despite not being able to wear them past a few hours!"

"For 'dressing up', to feel a bit more glamorous! I think they look hot."

"I'm 5' 2". Occasionally I like to be able to look straight at the people around me."

"To gain height, which i hope may gain me respect in my male-dominated workplace."

"Love the way they look and the way they make me feel."

"Because they make me feel sexy."

"What else is there? I enjoy the feeling of restriction and the challenge of walking in heels. I think that they are incredibly sexy and I have many for different purposes and occasions. When I wear them I feel amazing. I wear them for myself!"

"To feel sexy... love dancing in heels... enjoy the genderfuck..."

"I believe feminism and femininity are not mutually exclusive."

"I always liked the way Eddie Izzard carried it off and wanted to try it..."

"Because I fool myself into believing that this time it'll be ok."





# SEX EDUCATION IN IRELAND

WORDS BY SHEILA

[illegible]

While much of the western hemisphere was engaging in the sexual revolution or STI swapping frenzy that was the sixties. The Irish were on our knees also, only we were praying and confessing a million times a day. We were looking elsewhere as thousands of women were sent to years of hard labour and petrified of going blind for life for even thinking about willies and tatas.

Once Rome rule was established within this country, the precedent for skewed sexual attitudes was set. By 1929, The Censorship of Publications Act was put in place, in direct response to those heathens across the pond beginning to enact family planning policies. The act itself had the spin-off benefits of creating employment for young fellas in Easons' book shop to rip out every page remotely relating to any information on contraception. Thus creating an unsolved mystery more complex than that of the Bermuda triangle for generations, as to where exactly did those pages go?

Luckily the sound young fellas of Easons', interested in getting the ride themselves, kept hold of some of these pages and so word spread like an erotic game of Chinese whispers on the ways and manners of not having ninety children per household. Unamused, the church upped their game and a mere six years later enacted the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act 1935. This amendment outright prohibited the importation or sale of any contraceptive. 1935 became Ireland's official year of no craic and saw the advent of The Public Dance Halls Act. Which basically killed Irish culture by not allowing dancing to happen anywhere without an expensive licence for fear of immorality created by listening to foreign filth such as jazz. This act shamefully still exists today.

The moral crusade powered by prayer, tea and priests' sexual frustrations rattled on, going even further in 1946 by updating the Censorship of Publications Act. Not content with ripping out contraceptive ads, entire books alluding to indecent acts were now denied publication and circulation.

All was relatively quiet for the subsequent two decades in Ireland. Women continued flinging out babies quicker than rabbits; sexual misguidance, restrictions and church domination led to a frenzy of child sexual abuse and the incarceration of thousands of women in the aforementioned Laundries. These were barbaric institutions ran by the nuns, church and state to 'correct' women's behaviour.

As the rest of the world began to legislate for abortion in the sixties, Ireland took the radical step of opening a marriage guidance clinic in the national maternity hospital. Offering gems of information on the

extremely ineffective rhythm method, the only family planning strategy the church endorse. Irish families could now dodge just a few more hungry mouths to feed and dirty arses to wipe whilst still producing enough kids for a GAA team with subs.

More and more contraceptives kept on slipping through the net. Much like the few little sperms that sneak past baby dodging devices, the few that got through began to change things dramatically. Pills and coils were introduced and marketed as menstrual cycle regulators. The wonderfully brazen IFFA were set up and offered out condoms on a donation basis, cleverly circumnavigating the law prohibiting the sale of condoms. A landmark case was brought to the Supreme Court by Mrs. Mc Gee. She was going spare about her spermicidal jelly being whipped off her by the good Catholics in customs upon her return from the devils playground, England, in 1973. She won her case and it became legal for married couples to get contraception on prescription. I like to think her name is why scores of young wans and fellas still refer to lady bits as 'gees' to this very day.

Consecutive governments have all been petrified of the S-Sshhhhh .E.-X. Issues in Ireland. They have continuously and vehemently tried to roll back any tiny steps of progression. IFPA released an unbelievably successful guide for family planning in 1971 but in a fit of toddler rage, dressed up as legal discourse, the Censorships Board prohibited its further distribution. Ireland's number one Mary, that is after Mary the mother of god, Mary Robinson tried to introduce a bill to amend the Acts preventing the sale and import of contraceptives. The future president's bill was denied even a reading.

In more recent times the HPV vaccine, which prevents cervical cancer if girls get vaccinated before becoming sexually active. It was introduced in 2005 by yet another Mary of Ireland, Mary Harney, and then withdrawn. Many middle aged men within the government were very concerned that by vaccinating these legally aged young girls, promiscuity would be promoted and the island would be brimming with young sluts all of a sudden. Sense prevailed some years later and the vaccination programme was reinstated.

This disgusting back and forth continued for decades at a mind numbing pace. Only through the sheer determination of varying copped-on moon cup brigades, the IFPA and countless other individuals did the country mature in its sexuality. Through their sitting through countless tedious meetings, lobbying and devising numerous amazing actions they continuously challenged the government's position on sexual health on the island. I won't go through all the Acts much further as it gets to be a load of disappointing dry shite after a while, but suffice to say it dragged on and on.

Rape was criminalised in the early eighties; it wasn't until the early nineties that rape was legally recognised to occur within marriages. Condoms were made widely available in 1993, except for anywhere the youth may congregate, and only as a response to the worsening AIDS crisis. Homosexuality finally became decriminalised in the early nineties and so it went - Ireland was dragged kicking and screaming into

modernity.

The coke binge or the 'Celtic Tiger' that was the nineties saw hordes of people landing back on the island with bold big new ideas from afar. Sex could be enjoyed and a ride no longer carried a marriage sentence. RTE the national broadcaster, reveling in all its new tax monies, took it upon themselves to import tons of American drivel instead of investing in Irish talent. They not only succeeded in helping mould a generation of mid Atlantic accents but also showcased the more sexually liberal attitudes of far off sunny lands. And the internet, well t'was a huge step up from blue movies and French letters.

So instead of acclimatising, Ireland was whacked straight into a post sexual revolution world, without a guide book. The majority of the nation are now out having the literal ball but the government must still have their fingers crossed that we will head back to mass someday and that's why they are holding back on implementing a national sexual health strategy regardless of Ireland's growing Chlamydia epidemic.

Sex education is a disaster; in fact education in Ireland full stop is a bit of a disaster. Despite kiddie fiddling a quarter of the nation, Catholicism still dominates the classroom. Over ninety per cent of primary and secondary schools are Catholic run; each school has a priest on its board, the Vatican guiding its ethos while prayers guide the teachers.

Not content with religious domination, many Irish schools work also within gender segregation – a fantastically efficient way of creating divisions and deepening stereotyping of genders even further. The bigwigs in the UN Human Rights commission have continuously pestered the Irish government over their ridiculously restrictive abortion laws but also its constitutional entrenchment of gender inequality. The UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women stepped in and gave out to Ireland in 2005 for its “ Persistent stereotypical views of the social roles and responsibilities of women”. I’m sure not letting the boys and girls learn and play together will massively improve the situation and get the UN off the government’s back.

Even though over ten per cent of our population are legging it to find work and hope elsewhere, Ireland still has one of the youngest populations in Europe. In 1995 Ireland introduced RSE (relationship and sexual education) for secondary schools. It has not been entirely rolled out nearly twenty years on. A study carried out by the wannabe politicians of the future, Dáil na nÓg, found 74% of senior cycle secondary school students received no sexEd whilst in their senior cycle. Kind of petrifying considering the average age for first getting the leg over is between 16 and 19.

The Irish Study of Sexual Health and Relationships, published in 2006, was a very very long academic report the only one of its kind ever done in Ireland. It contains many sobering and unknown nuggets of facts, such as Ireland's oldies in the age bracket of 50-65 are the least sexually experienced population in all of Europe. It also found that 44% of the population have received absolutely no sex education, nada, zilch, nothing at all. How people even know which hole to go for is beyond me.

Of those who have received sex education, it alarmingly breaks down further again: many people have learnt about the basic functions of sex, while some have been lucky to learn about contraception but in no great detail. Sex education in Ireland, although not as warped and Christian as the abstinence-only sex ed programmes in some of the US, is not exactly nipple tassels, knickers swirling liberal either.

Sex education in Ireland focuses on don't get pregnant, don't get pregnant oh and lest you forget don't get pregnant. A biology lesson and a brief mention of all venereal diseases known to humankind is meant to suffice in preventing getting yourself up the pole and all ya need to know for getting the hard shift.

So we have a nation of people out getting the ride, many enjoying it and going for gold, but beyond what feels right don't really having a notion what they are at. Sex, like everything else in this world, is layered with social constructs. Ireland's two biggest constructors have been the church and now the media.

If the church was all about preventing sex and promoting silence, TV and film loudly declares, drop your knickers, jump on board and get the

ride. Sex on screen is usually straight. Vanilla sex on TV, women getting a pounding in porn. No one ever asks before getting the leg over, STDs don't seem to exist, nor do crisis pregnancies so no need for condoms or conversations. Persistence is key: many times women are merely confused about their desires and just need a man to keep at them, her lips say no but her eyes say yes.

Much like Irish classrooms, the governors of mainstream media land seem quite content in playing a game of divide and conquer amongst the sexes. The UN reckons it will be at least another seventy five years before we see gender equality on screen. Women have feck all screen time in comparison to lads, are rarely the main player in a show and usually are all about getting the baps out or showing a bit of leg. Women like kids should be seen but not really heard. Well they can be heard but just enough so no one can get accused of being sexist. Men get the soggy butt end of a smoke on screen too. Poor guys are constantly shown as go getter aggressive types with the emotional range of a pet rock.

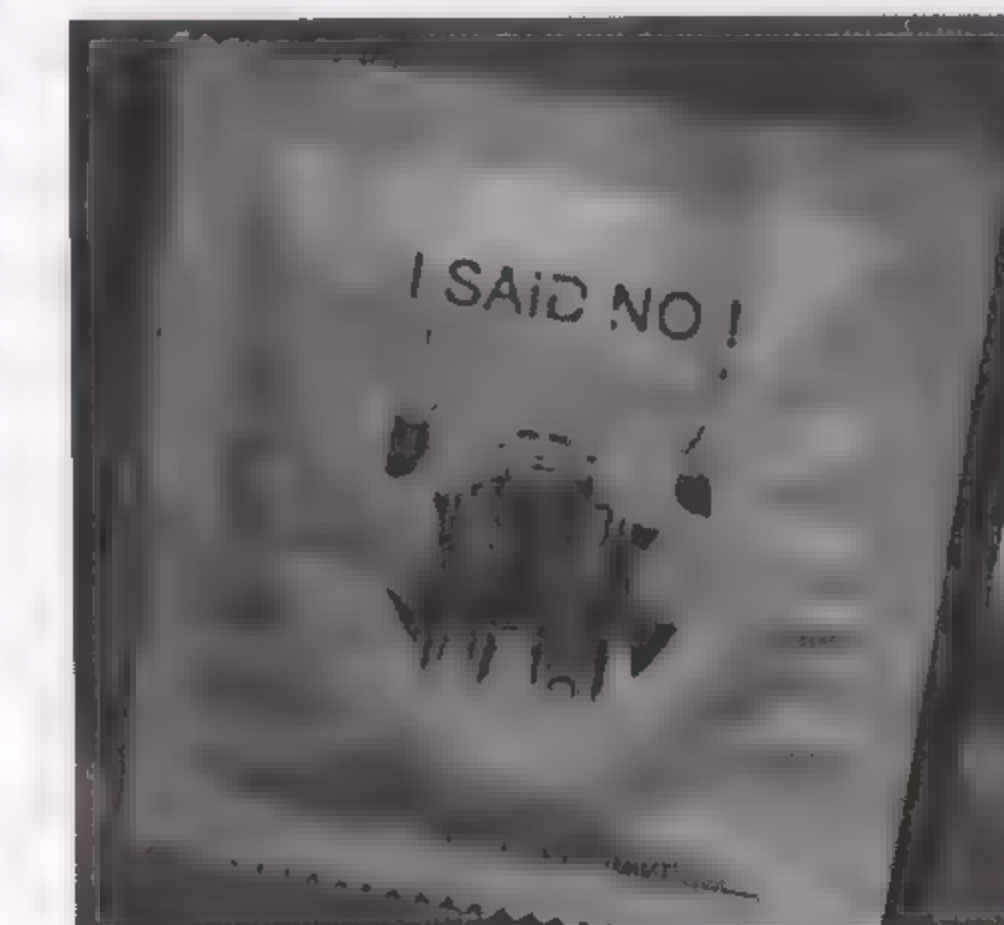
Granted a TV hour, nor film have the timescales to portray sex in all its fanny farting glory, but they could go a long way further in how they portray sex and gender. TV when it first emerged was deemed by many to be a portal to hell. It is in fact the main gateway for capitalism. Media as a mainstream medium feeds off societies insecurities, pushing its own profit driven agenda. Creating gender caricatures is just another form of perpetrating patriarchy, making sure there are a top and a bottom, a buyer and a bought.

Advertising encourages people to act upon their desires in the most immediate of fashions. The world of capitalism (I am about to deliver a groundbreaking revelation)..... Is all about individualism, instant satisfaction and ego boosting entitlement after all.

Rape and sexual assault is another fun bag of events viewers frequently have the pleasure of watching in between handfuls of popcorn. Rape in mainstream media land is typically shown as some individual fucker lurking in the dark waiting to pounce from beyond the shadows on some poor lass, who will then fight for her life. This is where “the media” get it all wrong again. One in three women gets sexually assaulted in her lifetime. This would imply that there are some ridiculously busy sick individuals out there. Unfortunately the one in three women whom get assaulted usually know their attacker.

The people doing the attacking are people we know. They are friends, they are family, work colleagues and classmates. People are engaging five hours and upwards a day with media and citing media outlets as their biggest resource for sexual education. As much as the screen is a reflection of society it also moulds society and by constantly perpetrating false ideas of gender, sex and violence, media plays its hand in propagating sexual miseducation and violence. We can't really expect a profit-driven sector to act as a social worker for societal ills but we can view it more critically and express those criticisms.

So the long and short of it all is when it comes to sex we have had really awfully shite teachers. The nation would barely scrape by a foundation level D in sex Ed were it a subject on the leaving cert. Which is a shame because getting the ride is one of the few activities the government has yet to tax. It would be amazing to be French and know all there is to know about sex, to have no Catholic guilt at all, for STDs not to exist, for actual storks to bring you babies when you only really really want them, for every ride to be a complete laugh, better than any rollercoaster you have ever been on and everyone involved having the time of their life. Sex can be all those things minus the storks, we just need to take sex education into our own hands. Clearly we can't be relying on schools or tellies to be putting us in the know-how of every hook up coming safely and happily constantly between work shifts and dole payments.





## RAG MAMAS: A CONVERSATION ABOUT

One of the challenges of having children is that you often don't have the time to do things you used to do, like staying active in your favourite anarchofeminist publishing collective! But just because RAG members have kids doesn't mean they aren't still thinking about anarchofeminism and wrestling with the issues it raises. Angela managed to get the RAG members with children to sit down together for a chat about life as an activist and a mother.

**Angela:** Now, in terms of the way you guys live your lives as people, and maybe I ask this as someone who's trying to have kids, how do you see yourselves now, versus before kids?

**Shonagh:** Trying to remember back that far! [laughter] My son is nearly seven.

**Deirdre M:** It's a richer, more complicated life. It's not easier, but it's certainly richer. It's the joy of having them as opposed to the absolute freedom that you had before.

**Angela:** But in terms of the way you define yourself, and the way you think about yourself and your place in the world, has that changed?

**Deirdre M:** Completely.

**Sheila:** For me, the person that goes travelling, generally places where I go, which have been mostly Muslim countries for the past while, being a woman who has borne a child definitely gives me much more meaningful conversation than peers who haven't had children. If I go into a hamam [public steam baths], they can see that I've got stretch marks, and it breeds more acceptance when I'm away, definitely. But it's the flip side in Ireland.

**Angela:** So you feel judged here, and accepted there?

**Sheila:** Yeah! Kind of, actually, yeah. I get a lot of interest from people in my own age group, like 'Woah! How old were you when you had your kid?' That kind of thing, whereas when I'm away I'm just sort of taken into this coven of motherhood.

**Deirdre H:** I feel that same richness and joy [of motherhood], but also the responsibility part. Especially at my job. I feel a lot of pressure just to knuckle down and concentrate on my career, which isn't a very anarchist thing to say. But I do feel that at the moment, and I don't think I'd feel that way if I didn't have kids. There'd be more freedom or you could stop your job for a while, which I don't think I can do now. That's what's been on my mind: this feeling of weight. Work work work work work work!

**Angela:** Do you ever feel like your life is over?

**Deirdre H:** No! [laughter] You've said something like that before...

**Angela:** I say it because this is what some people think.

**Deirdre H:** I'm not a very good model because I don't go out, and I don't have a very balanced life. I think other people manage the balance a bit better. For me, it's work and home, which isn't ideal for anyone. I certainly think my life has changed, but it's my life - it's not all for my kids. It's definitely me making my own decisions and making my own life. It's just very different to what it was before. For me there's no room for activism at the moment at all. When I was going to RAG meetings before I stopped going, during the meetings it felt like a screw, tightening, which is totally normal because you're expected to take on tasks. But I felt like,

'There's nothing! There's no more... there's nothing left! Everything is taken up! There's no space for that.'

Looking at motherhood and activism, it's not like you can't be an activist if you're a mother, because people are, but I think much less. There's a huge drop-off of activists once women start having children. Even historically, looking at the famous female anarchists or socialists, they either didn't have kids at all or someone else looked after their kids. It was a conscious decision for them in the biographies that



I've read. Like Emma Goldman purposely didn't have an operation that would have allowed her to have kids because she didn't want them; she wanted to devote her life to activism.

**Sheila:** I also think there isn't enough space created for people with children in activist spaces. I was at the Gluaiseacht Gathering two weekends ago and a consent weekend in Mayo last weekend. I brought my son to one of those weekends, and my friend brought her kid to the other. The kids were not catered for whatsoever. I was really pissed off on Sunday. I wanted to do a workshop on how to facilitate the kids to be there

## RAISING KIDS AS AN ANARCHAFEMINIST

artwork by Laura

because people just don't have a clue. If there's more people willing to step outside meetings on a rota basis to look after kids, people could still participate; people could still do actions.

**Shonagh:** It's indicative of how society is: society doesn't cater for children at all. It's set up in this way that home is the place for the mam and the kids, and of course you get isolated.

**Deirdre H:** Yet the fathers don't have the same thing - it doesn't affect them, and that's in my lefty circles as well. And not just in activism, but in work. You have children, and then you have to

doing? She's a bad mother, la la la. Lots of whispers underneath the table, but fuck them! If you want to go do something, just go do it. The amount of times I've heard, 'Don't do that' since I've had my son, but I've just gone ahead and done it anyway and it's worked out fine for all of us. You just have to break through the mould a little bit.

**Angela:** You really have to be a problem solver in a way and not be afraid, to give up and say, 'Well, I don't have childcare, I don't have this, or that.'

**Sheila:** You just have to hammer on.

**Deirdre M:** The support network - My partner is great, like, I'm here now, I teach at night during the week, and I'm very free to do as I need to do or want to do. But also co-housing was great when the kids were younger. That was a big, big ticket to freedom. That was great. And just the rest of the support network that I've got around me. I realise I'm very lucky! [laughs] My parents are brilliant. It's hard to set up your life this way, but it's possible. It can be really tough to do co-housing, but it's possible. And hugely freeing. Did I say that? [laughter] So yeah, mutual support, mutual support!

**Sheila:** That's one thing that keeps me rooted in Dublin is the support that I have here, massively. I wouldn't be able to it otherwise; I'd go insane.

**Deirdre H:** My problem is not getting someone to mind the kids so I can go out, it's that I don't see them. So two days a week, I want to see them. I don't want someone to mind them so I can go off. So if I want to go to activist things or anywhere, I'd like them to come with me. And in the evening, most evenings I'd like to

be there to put them to bed, and then I can go out afterwards. I have no problem getting someone to mind them, but most of the time I'm really tired and I just want to go to sleep by ten. Up at six, still getting up with them during the night.

**Sheila:** My son used to get petrified about going down to Rossport. He'd say, 'I don't want you to protest'. I don't want you to protest'. It got to the point where I'm the bad mother, I wouldn't listen to him, I'd just do it anyway. He was so freaked out that I had to sit him down and listen to him and talk to him and then slowly take him down and let him see what the direct action was. In his head it was far bigger than what it actually was. Once he'd seen it, he was like 'That's cool, you can go protest', and he quite enjoys going down to Mayo now.

**Deirdre M:** The kids do love the camps.

**Deirdre H:** What about things that you can't do with kids like write an article or going to meetings?

**Sheila:** Shared housing helps massively. Right now, I haven't been very good at it but it helps hugely.

**Angela:** Because you have quite a few people that take him, and you do exchanges with other parents.

**Sheila:** Like swapping children! Like a merry-go-round!

**Deirdre H:** Maybe it's like full time work outside the home as well. I do 40 or more hours of work per week. My feeling is that if you want to get involved with activism you have to then not work 40 hours a week, and that's a decision that you have to make.

**Angela:** If you can.

**Deirdre H:** Yeah, if you can.



Sometimes you don't have the freedom to make it. But I sometimes think that maybe I should look at the whole thing completely differently.

**Sheila (to Deirdre H):** Your kids are all so young still. I think it depends on what stage your kids are at too.

**Angela:** I imagine it's easier to go to a protest because you can put the kids in a stroller and walk – it's almost like a day out.

**Deirdre M:** Going to meetings is harder.

**Deirdre H:** Or writing an article.

**Deirdre M:** If I go out, it's usually to teach. But, especially when they were younger, I would have a really hard time justifying leaving the house in the evening if it weren't to go out and make money. It's hard to justify it to my partner; it's hard to justify it to myself. And meetings didn't fall into that category.

**Angela:** That is such a huge statement, if you think about it.

**Deirdre M:** It's gotten less important as the children have gotten older. But now there are things that are career-related for me that aren't money-making. There's the networking aspect of me having to see other people's shows. My partner is really understanding about this, which is brilliant, but I can imagine it could be really contentious if he weren't.

**Angela (to Shonagh):** I feel like you were doing it for a while and then you seemed to reach your threshold.

**Shonagh:** Yeah, college, all the interpersonal stuff, and my mam getting sick. I just wasn't able for it. For my own sanity, I had to pull back and concentrate on getting through college, really.

**Angela:** I feel like that's a lesson for our kids as much as anything – to learn to prioritise and take the time for yourself when you need it and to not do too much. It's a lesson I wish had been taught to me.

**Sheila:** When my son was two, I

was in full time college, I was doing two jobs, trying to have a social life, and starting to get into activism. I burned myself out silly. I think you learn the hard way more so initially than the easy way.

**Angela:** Did you have an expectation that you could carry on with your life as normal, just with a couple of extra duties?

**Sheila:** No, it was me thinking, 'I need money. Get a job. I need to get an education. All right, do that.' And then I tried juggling it all and realised that you can't do it all. The justification is a huge thing because I don't think my son's father would understand if I said, 'Hey I'm going to spend all my time that I don't have my son down in Mayo'. I have to give a justification to him for how I spend my time, whether it's in education or making money. You do have to justify what you're doing.

**Shonagh (to Sheila):** Even when he's with his father?

**Sheila:** Yeah. I think so. To a certain extent, yeah. Because he wouldn't understand. We've agreed that I can have big blocks of time off from custody, but it can't just be me free willy nilly going off and partying or anything like that.

**Angela:** Do you think he feels that way because he's got a job and he thinks that's how life should be lived?

**Sheila:** Yeah. It's the way a lot of people think though. I recently put up a post on Facebook, 'What'll I do with my time?' and my cousin, real smart, wrote, 'Get a job' straight off the bat.

**Angela:** I suppose that's capitalism there.

**Sheila:** It is.

**Deirdre H:** An interesting article I read recently was saying, 'Oh, Feminism got it wrong'. It wasn't anti-feminism but they were saying that in the mode of feminism that pushed for independence and women to be accepted in the workplace, the idea of women spending time with

children was devalued.

**Shonagh:** It doesn't question anything does it? It doesn't really question the basis of how wrong the work/life dichotomy is. It's obvious that women will end up with two jobs: the job outside the home and the job inside.

**Deirdre H:** I find the whole work/life thing difficult. And I don't think there's an answer. Well, revolution! But in the short term...

**Deirdre M:** I talk to the kids about anarchism. The kids' perception is that it means doing what you want to do for work and not having a boss. Or being self-directed and not having to be told what to do, which is a parenting issue because sometimes you have to tell them what to do. So the concept of legitimate authority (à la Chomsky) idea is handy, though not necessarily well respected, but necessary. Those are the simple words we use.

**Deirdre H:** Legitimate authority?

**Deirdre M:** Legitimate authority and also being your own boss.

**Shonagh:** If I talk to my son about anarchism, I would talk about it more in terms of governance, and what the government is and how that works, how our society would work.

**Deirdre M:** Yeah, we talk about that too. But I wouldn't say that that would be the first thing they would think of.

**Sheila:** I don't think I've ever sat down and said, 'This is anarchism' or anything like that. It's more that we have an ongoing social commentary that tends to lead towards anarchism. Maybe I need to have that conversation with him, actually!

**Deirdre H:** Yeah, I'm thinking that I need to talk feminism more to my boy.

**Sheila:** When he wakes up tomorrow, he'll have to do all his own washing and cooking! [laughter]

**Deirdre H:** It'll be the turning point of his life, at three and three quarters. 'I heard all these voices downstairs!' [laughter]

# It's Just Hair

by Abi

Oppression comes in many forms, hits many bones

You might seem perplexed, but it even goes as far as one's hair.

If you're black, I don't need to tell you

You KNOW.

Do I stick with my natural, curliness, or should I conform?

Is there even a choice?

I could leave it wild and just let it all hang out

I could be straightened, stick a weave on, less hassle

Plus I blend in

but I'm still free cause it's my choice.

Isn't it?

If I straighten it, no one notices

No one notices my hair, its the way it should be...sort of.

It's easier to handle even if I burn my scalp while doing it

But AT LEAST its one less thing that makes me stand out

In this sea of white

I look 'respectable', cause we sure as hell ain't in the 70s anymore

Its hard enough getting hired by a firm,

Can't make them uncomfortable,

thinking I might be too black

Because these things do matter

I know who I am, and proud of this lovely dark skin tone

but I also know what world I live in

And, if I stay curly, I gotta deal with all this...hair

But I never learned how to take care of it, its always been straight!

I look to my mum who shakes her head, to my aunt who rolls her eyes

To my black friends who look at me as a matyr

To the shops, yup all products for white people.

I'm screwed.

To the internet, wooh a whole community!

I gain strength slowly, curly hair means even curlier clothes!

Accessories!

But wait, a divide in my beloved community,

Once again this hegemony divides us

Where are all the role models for people whose hair ACTUALLY looks like mine

I see loose curls everywhere, as the epitome of natural hair

While tighter looking curls like mine

Are pretty, but well you know

Coincidence that once again, that once again,

looser curls are the closest "natural hair" to our white oppressors?

I think not

So do we aim for that? Aaaah we can't escape.

I'm bewildered, Is this STILL a choice?

Can we ever escape, ever?

Goddamit its just hair.

But we care, because once again its been decided for us

That our natural hair isn't natural.

But screw them, do what is YOU

As best as you can

Straighten the damn thing and rock it, but always fully aware of why

Leave it wild if you feel, and experience the pleasure of those curls

(staying strong against the backlash)

Because they have made sure their fingers

encompass most of our lives

from our hair down to our reproductive rights

This isn't to tell you how your hair should be,

But for us to remember that if they can control so little a thing

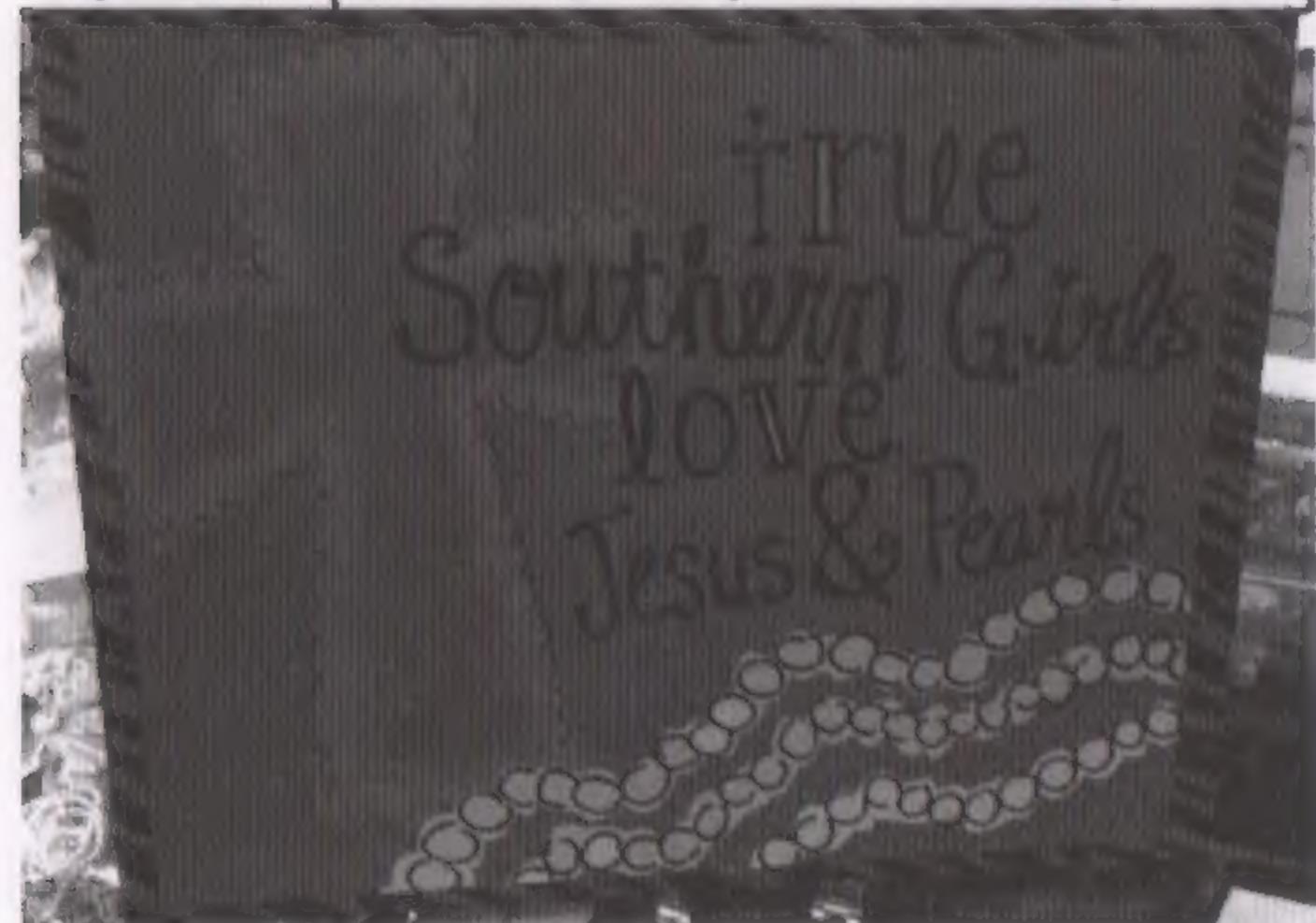
As our own hair in our own minds

We gotta start fighting back, because it never ends there.



## MY WET HOT AMERICAN SUMMER

Many of you can relate to having compulsive tendencies especially when you are about to head off on a trip. Well mine happens to be checking my passport. This may seem a tad on the scatty side, but I will fill you in on why I have become so obsessive about mine. Rewind to 2007: I am preparing to go India for a month, vaccinations complete, tiny bag packed and a colossal medicine bag the size of a small pharmacy just in case anything goes awry. You can't get the super cream that is sudocream anywhere else in the world and let's face it, it is the wonder cream. Morning of departure everything is checked, or so I think. Have my passport, tickets printed and off we go. Three hours later I'm in the queue to board the flight to London, take out my passport to have the picture page open and ready and who do I see staring back at me but my



friend Liam. I kid you not this actually happened. I had taken the wrong passport and it hadn't dawned on me to check I had the right one. To cut a long story short, I ended up going back home and frantically searching the house for my passport, which was found 5 hours later in a "Safe Place"...

Fast forward to this summer: despite having checked my passport at least 100 times, I'm at Dublin airport off to New York for the summer, still checking the bloody passport like a woman possessed. We arrive in New York and to our apartment,

which is going to be home for 3 months. 118th St. on 2nd Ave to be precise, which is affectionately known by the locals as El Barrio based on the demographic living there which happens to be Puerto Ricans and African Americans. Coming from the very white Ireland it was a shock to the system being in the minority as opposed to being in the majority. Our apartment, which was a one-bed with no windows (ok slight exaggeration: 3 windows, all looking out at a brick wall). Really sunny and light filled as you can imagine? Whenever people asked me where I was living, they were shocked to find out that I was living in that neighborhood due to its reputation. This experience was a truly authentic slice of America and indeed a new immigrant's life as we were at the bottom of the food chain. Harlem became home, although it wasn't without its issues. One frightening experience of being mugged on my way home at 5.30am left me slightly concerned walking home at night or after 12am from the subway. Luckily for me, no knife was pulled and nothing worse happened. Note to the wise: always a good idea to make friends with the people hanging out on the street near where you live, as that way you can bet that you cross your threshold safely. "Ireland" is what the members of the gang that hung out on my corner affectionately knew me as in the hood. Always guaranteed a smoke and a swig of whiskey - not cultural stereotype there, I promise?

Over the course of the summer I experienced female-only spaces in three very different forms. Personally, I am an advocate of women-only spaces. The first was at the legendary New York Dyke March at which I marshalled,

## WORDS AND IMAGES BY KT

Fyi peeps it's not illegal in the city of New York for women to be topless. I was delighted to discover this and for this reason I was able to walk from 42nd Street to Washington Square Park topless, which ended with women jumping into the fountain at the park. Tick for getting to be semi-naked in public. Next on the agenda, I found myself at a women's theatre collective called WOW in New York, which was open both to women and trans people. At the theatre they welcomed female diversity and encouraged all women to attend productions and to get involved with the daily running of the space. The theatre offers a creative place for women to explore both themselves and their bodies in a space that is free of sanctions ordinarily placed on women. The rule of thumb with the company is that nothing is too provocative or outrageous in the discovery of female artistry. The second was the highly controversial and politically contested Michigan

Womyn's Festival, a week long festival hidden in the depths of the Michigan forests. The festival was created as a direct response to women needing to create a safe space free from the confines of patriarchal oppression.

The Festival's "Intention" states that only women-born women are able to attend

but in reality, members of the trans\* community and those in varying stages of transition were visible. This was an amazing experience, as never before had I attended such a large female-only event. Honestly at times I felt overwhelmed by the levels of estrogen emanating from 3,500 women. Not for the faint hearted or nasal passage? That is a lot of boobs, I can assure you, as the majority of the women there (myself included) spent the week in various stages of nudity, and it was the exception for women to be dressed. Sometimes, though it felt that we were being indoctrinated into the cult of lesbianism. As you can imagine it was a kind of surreal experience in and of itself, the more obvious one being the lack of men. I have never seen such an eclectic mix of women before. There were of course the butch, femme and androgynous types, but there were women with beards. Never in my life had I had seen a bearded lady until then? It was multi racial and multi generational - in fact every type of woman imaginable was present. There were women driving tractors around the land and women driving huge carts that were the main mode of transport in and around the festival site. The showers were all communal and none of them had a shower curtain, so there was no choice in having a private shower; you

couldn't shave your legs if you wanted in private. Each woman in attendance was required to do two 4 hour work shifts over the course of the week. I spent 4 hours in the kitchen cutting and washing carrots and strange looking potatoes with blunt knives as well as 4 hours at the "Cuntree Store" with women telling me how much they loved my accent. Best place to be if you wanted to pick someone up. For those with a penchant for

live and intimate sexual performance, you shouldn't miss the Twilight Zone where things go bump in the night, yourself included. We happened to stumble upon a live fisting performance with three couples going at it in front of a large audience. After all, voyeurism is participation, right? At various stages throughout the week one was greeted with the cacophony of multiple orgasms coming from all directions when passing tents and indeed in shady areas.

Whilst the space that was created was safe and extremely free there was at times a feeling of control and suppression: you were only allowed to play female vocals, the lack of privacy when showering, chem free areas - no smoking, deodorant, drugs the list goes on. Another issue was the fact that the organisers excluded little boys from the age of 5 up to 10. There was an area called Brother Sun Boys Camp devoted to where women and their sons could camp, at no time where these boys allowed on the Land. Yes it is a music festival first and foremost and there were also a huge



plethora of workshops ranging from tent revival skills to archery to belly dancing dildo workshops, and radical feminism discussions of the community towards their trans inclusion policy that has sparked huge controversy within both communities. Unfortunately no pictures will appear of this week spent on the land due to the explicit request of what happens on the land stays on the land. Leaving the utopian ideal that was Michigan and travelling through the Bible Belt where racism, sexism and prejudices are still as rife as ever and making our way to liberal and open minded California could be called a journey from one end of the spectrum to the other and back around again. To make it even more interesting our travels were done with a 60 year old pothead from Memphis who felt the call of the open road and who donated her car to the cause of 2 Irish women making their way across America with very little money and embarked on an epic adventure. 6 weeks on the road and 6,000 miles and dollars later I'm sitting in the airport in Vegas frantically checking my passport.





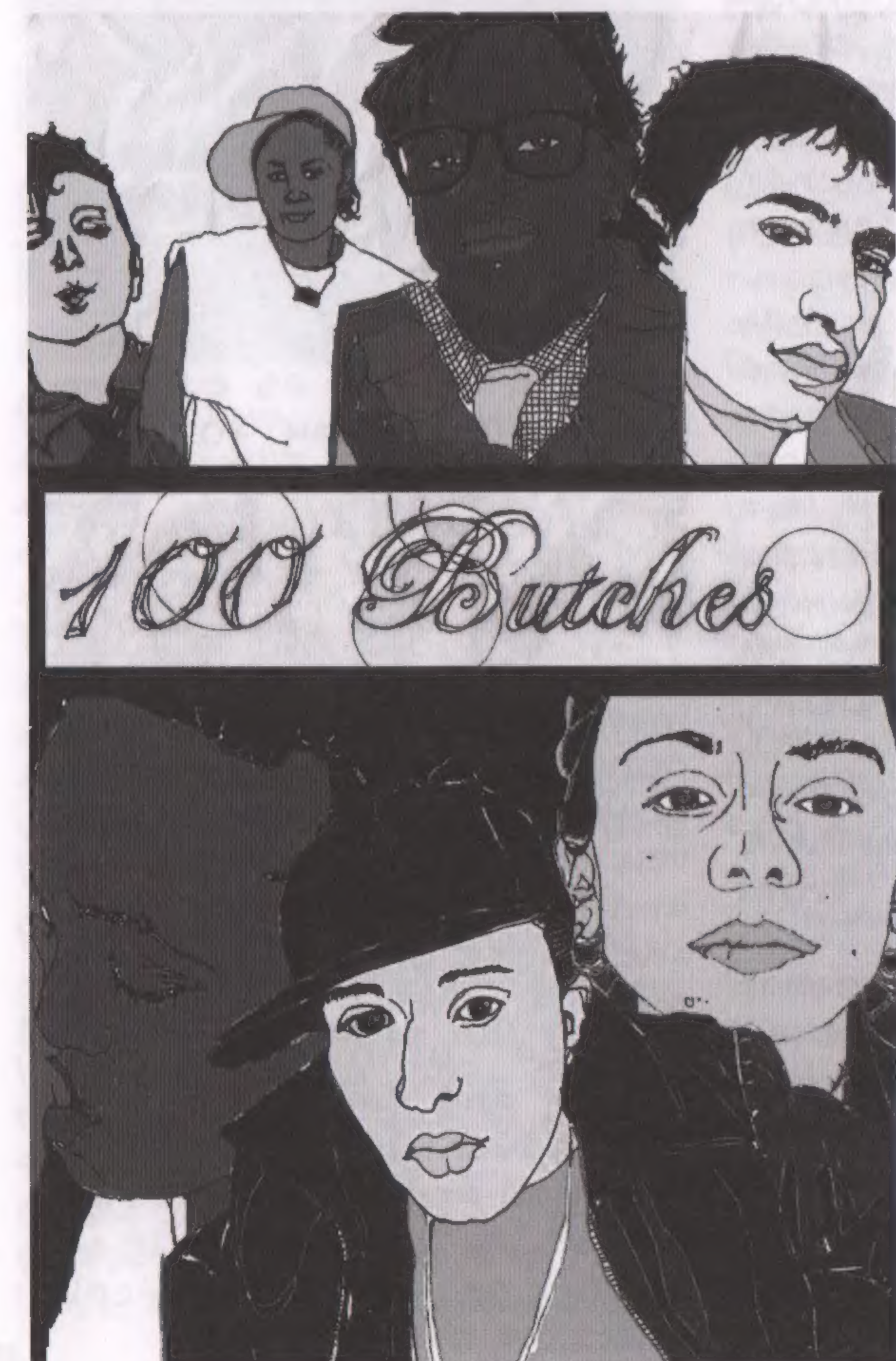
# QUEER AS BOOK

by Eve

Sometimes all I want to do is curl up someplace quiet and read. Sometimes, I only want to read words written by queer women. There is comfort and recognition in those words. There are paths and scraps of maps and survival techniques. I found my way to these women through different routes: borrowed books, dog-eared zines, friend's recommendations and chance findings trawling the internet. You won't always find their books in regular bookshops. They are lesbian, queer, black, of colour, femme, disabled, trans\*, working class, poor, butch, feminist women.

**Audre Lorde.** I can't say how much I love Audre Lorde. She is a sage, a warrior and a poet. Lorde was born in New York in 1934. Her parents were immigrants from the Caribbean, and her experience of growing up in a racist, sexist, homophobic time and place shaped her writing, and provided her with a sharp analysis of the intersections of sex, race and gender. Refusing easy answers or allegiances, Lorde explored the tensions between her identities as black, woman, lesbian, mother and poet. Her writing is raw and honest and beautiful, it is both poetic and polemical. Her wonderful "automythobiography", *Zami: A New Spelling of my Name*, is one of my very favourite books. Highly recommended also is *Sister Outsider*, a collection of her essays and speeches including 'The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house', 'the uses of anger: women responding to racism' and 'Age, race, class and sex: women redefining difference'. Her poetry can be found in *The Collected Poems of Audre Lorde*. I'd also recommend her biography.

**Dorothy Allison** is a working class, lesbian femme writer from South Carolina, USA. She is an eloquent, unflinching storyteller. She writes novels, essays and short stories, and much of her work is rooted in her poor southern upbringing. *Bastard Out of Carolina* is a semi-autobiographical novel following the story of a young queer girl growing up in rural Carolina. *Cavedweller* is an unputdownable novel focused on the fate of Delia Byrd, a former rock star who returns to her small town southern home to reclaim her two abandoned daughters. Allison's short stories and essays can be found in *Trash: Short Stories and Skin: Taking about Sex, Class and Literature*. She has also published a volume of poetry called *The Women Who Hate Me*. <http://www.dorothyallison.net/>



**Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha** is a queer, disabled, Sri Lankan, poet, writer, teacher and cultural worker based in North America. Her work deals with community, survival, race, queerness, dis/ability, abuse, resistance and love. Leah's work is immediate, wise, passionate and fierce. Her perspectives on dis/ability and activist communities are particularly important. She has several published volumes of poetry, including *Consensual Genocide* and *Love Cake*. She is the author of the powerful *FEMME SHARK MANIFESTO* and co-edited *The Revolution Starts At Home: Confronting Intimate Violence in Activist Communities*. As well as writing she also does spoken word performance. Her website has lots of info and hosts her sporadically updated blog: <http://www.brownstargirl.org/>

**Leslie Feinberg** came of age as a young butch lesbian in the factories and gay bars of Buffalo, N.Y. in the 1960s. Since that time, Feinberg has been a grass roots activist and a journalist, writing on and articulating a transgender politics. As well as LGBT struggles she has been involved in the trade union, socialist and anti-war movements. Feinberg's first novel *Stone Butch Blues* is the powerful and moving story of Jess, a young working class butch dyke through the '50s and the tumult of the '60s. Feinberg's two

non-fiction books are *Transliberation: Beyond Pink or Blue* and *Transgender Warriors: Making History from Joan of Arc to Denis Rodman*, which was the first analysis of the historical roots of transgender oppression.

<http://www.transgenderwarrior.org>

**Alison Bechdel's** graphic novels are awesome. Check out *The Essential Dykes to Watch Out For* and her two graphic memoirs *Fun Home* and *Are You My Mother?* <http://dykestowatchoutfor.com/>

**Julia Serano** is a super smart bi, trans-woman, poet. Her book *Whipping Girl: Transsexual Woman on Sexism and the Scapegoating of Femininity* is very insightful. She has a great blog with lots of articles and links.

<http://www.juliaserano.com/>

**Jeanette Winterson** is a lesbian novelist from the north of England. She was adopted as a child and raised in a working class Pentecostal family. Her most famous book is *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*, but my favourites are her recent memoir, *Why Be Happy When You Could Be Normal* (thanks Clare) and *Written On the Body*.

<http://www.jeanettewinterson.com/>

I heart **Bevin Brandlandingham!** Her mission is "to make the world a safe place for people to love themselves, regardless of their differences". Her very amazing blog <http://queerfatfemme.com/> explores her pursuit of joy and has insightful and entertaining reading on queerness, femme-ness, self love, body acceptance, excellent relationship/ dating advice, fat politics, fashion, partying and more. Go there now!

**QZAP** queer zine archive project: "The mission of the Queer Zine Archive Project (QZAP) is to establish a "living history" archive of past and present queer zines and to encourage current and emerging zine publishers to continue to create. In curating such a unique aspect of culture, we value a collectivist approach that respects the diversity of experiences that fall under the heading "queer."

<http://www.qzap.org/>

**Kate Bornstein**, queer, trans, American writer and performer. Kate has written widely on gender and trans issues. Her books include *ender Outlaw: On Men, Women, and the Rest of Us*, *y Gender Workbook: How to Become a Real Man, a Real Woman, the Real You, or Something Else Entirely*, *Hello, Cruel World: 101 Alternatives to Suicide for Teens, Freaks, and Other Outlaws* and *A Queer and Pleasant Danger: A Memoir* <http://katebornsteintypepad.com/kate.bornsteins.blog/>. Also her partner **Barbara Carralles** is an author, sex educator, university lecturer, workshop facilitator, sex/life coach, motivational speaker and theater artist at <http://barbaracarrallas.com/>. I want to read *Spit and Passion* by queer Latina punk **Cristy C. Road**, *Rubyfruit Jungle* by **Rita Mae Brown** is amazing.

images: Cover of graphic novel by **Elish Lim** (left), Stencil graffiti of Audre Lorde (upper right).

## OTHER RECOMMENDED AUTHORS

Nell Mc Cafferty

Nuala O Faolain

Jewelle Gomez

Jeanette Winterson

Joan Nestle

Gloria E. Anzaldúa

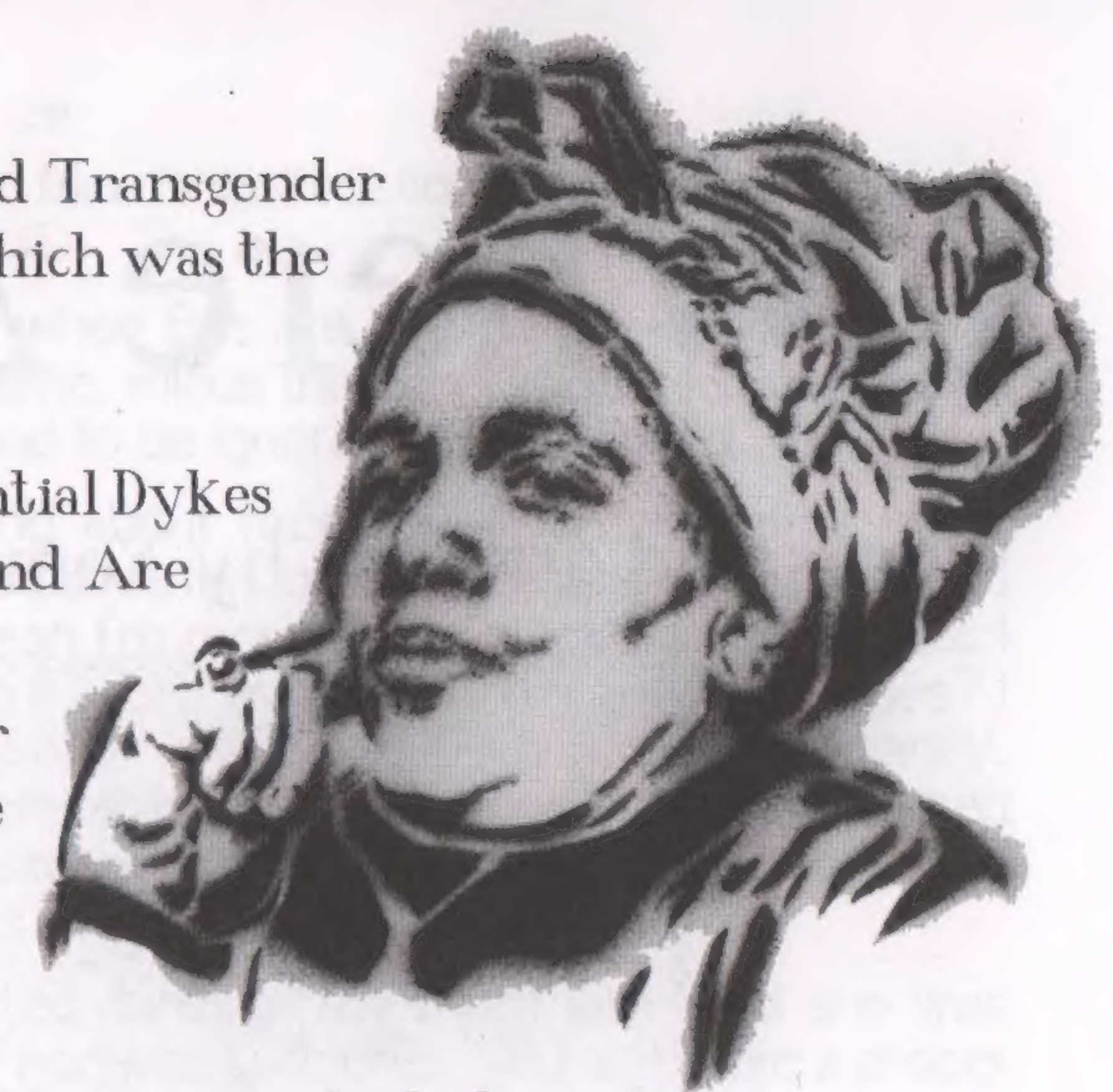
Kate Bornstein

Queer Fat Femme

Imogen Binnie

Michelle Tea

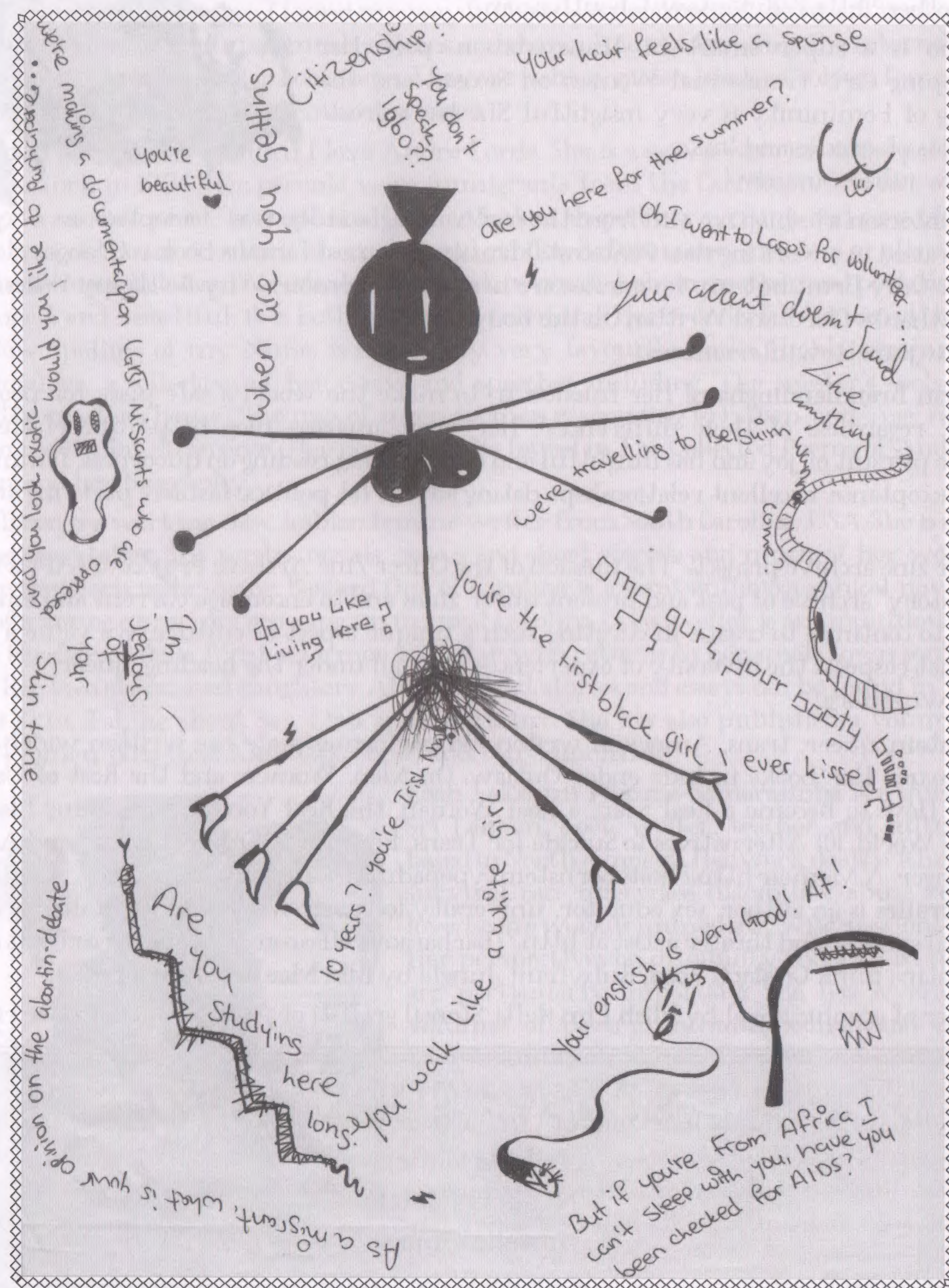
Cristy C. Road





# #Where Are You From?

words and artwork by Yemi



I used to be fine with this question at first – people just want to know where I was born, they want to place my accent, they want to place my skin tone, they want to know where I'm really from. I'll say; 'I'm from Nigeria, my mum's from this part and my dad's from that place. I used to live in this country but I lived in that country for years too'.

These questions grow tiresome after hearing them all since I was 12 (I'm 23 now). It gets ridiculous. Stupid. Confusing. Frustrating. Upsetting.

I knew who I was when I was younger: a young Christian Nigerian girl. I was anonymous. I was one of the others. When we moved to Ireland I became hugely aware of my race, something I never experienced before because I looked like everyone else, whether I was in an African country or in the UK. That started my new and continuous

stupid identity of being 'the only black girl' at every social event, school and friendships/relationships I had. When I got into race politics, things got more complicated.

The only way I can describe this confusion in my head is probably like when Eve ate the fruit of knowledge and immediately understood that her heaven was really just earth this whole time, minus the oppression. Her knowledge of herself and the world freed her but it also caused her upset. It was good to be ignorant while it lasted.

The knowledge I gain (the internet was the biggest tool to my learning about race things, among other stuff. Seriously, the internet has almost saved my life in so many ways, it's so powerful) of my race and nationality and living in Ireland, the more relieved, upset and confused I got; I mean, yeah I'm proud to be black sometimes but I know almost nothing about being Nigerian. How can I call myself Nigerian if I don't even know my own languages? I haven't even seen Naija since I was 10. I had an English accent, I fancy women more and am critical of Christianity. Those aren't Nigerian traits. All I had was my family in this world, in whatever country we stayed at, I experienced abuse in the family and couldn't escape for years. I also had no friends, except my sister. I couldn't afford to isolate myself even more by saying I might be gay and atheist at 17. There was no time for that yet.

There was this African fashion show my family went to. When I started dancing, my mum later said she was ashamed of me because I can't even dance like a 'proper African woman' nor dress like one. 'You aren't like a proper African woman. Why can't you be more like your mates?'

I went home crying that night because I felt really ashamed of not behaving like a real Nigerian girl. I'd hear the message from my mum or other Nigerians that homosexuality is bad, not dressing the 'right' way or not attending church and doing not-Naija things were bad.

I didn't feel Nigerian but still felt proud to be from there I suppose. Sometimes, I'd exaggerate my Naija accent to feel authentic, and that's embarrassing. Which culture did I belong in? I had only white Irish friends. I hate being that 'one black girl' in every event. I didn't know how to 'act' Nigerian, and it was hard to merge two cultures into one when I was so sure of myself before coming to Ireland. I find it humiliating that I don't know how to be mates with fellow Nigerian girls my age. I feel uncomfortable when they talk about boys and I haven't a clue what to say. I avoid African events and churches because I don't want to be seen as that European girl who doesn't know much about Nigerian (how can you not know your own language?? But you say you're from Lagos?? Can you not even cook egusi soup??). I don't think I'm a real Nigerian sometimes.

All the while I'm struggling with where I fit in. Complete strangers feel the need to ask where I'm from every day, every month, year after year. Sometimes, I just want to shout 'I don't know where I'm from!', hide and cry.

That question hurts. Because now I have to figure out a way to explain myself to you in a way that suits you and I. You won't be satisfied if I say Dublin; I won't be satisfied if I say Nigeria. Everything in this world is put into binaries, and if I can't fit the definition of being Black- Nigerian, it fucks my head up; I'm either with Irish culture or Naija culture. I can't fit either or be both.

It feels uncomfortable. In order to be a real Irish person, I have to be white and Catholic. If I want to be a real Nigerian person, I have to be straight, religious and speak my language. I can't tick the boxes of either culture, so I get asked so many questions from both sides.

I don't know where I'm from so I don't answer that question 'properly' anymore. It feels good actually. It's even fun to watch people's faces when I reply, 'I'm from Dublin' and they look utterly confused. When they ask where I'm really from, I say, 'Oh yeah, I'm really from Finglas' and smile at them. Heheheh.

One of the comforting things about this whole constant coming out of who I am to complete strangers and the upset that comes with it is I have friends who go through similar awkwardness.

There's a friend who gets asked all the time if she misses the weather back home, completely dismissing the fact that Ireland has been her home for years and years. I used to be friends with someone who, due to child abuse back in her original Irish county she got very angry whenever people asked her where she was from: 'You're Irish, but where in Ireland are you from? You're not a Dublin-head, your accent gives it away'.

That question always triggered her. She grew to dislike anyone who asked her where she was from. She didn't want to be reminded. I have other mates who try to avoid this question because they don't feel they're a part of whatever county they grew up in, versus the county they currently live in, or they tell people where they're from but because they don't fit a certain 'image' of that place. They are dismissed, sometimes by the people they share the same culture with, and that's frustrating: 'You can't be, seriously where are you really from?'

It does make me realise how a place of origin or a culture impacts a person's sense of identity so much. Some people grow up giving a straightforward answer to that question, even with pride.

'I am Nigerian', 'I'm proud to be Igbo', 'I am Italian', 'I'm Irish, from Donegal'.

Some people get confused, crumble, shy away from the question forever, get angry, make an excuse and cry somewhere or get very sarcastic or mute. The response is different for each person. I try to care not to ask that question to people anymore, unless they bring it up themselves. Asking someone what their identity is – who they are – can be a trigger.

My sense of who I am is still all fucked up in me head but I'm getting better. I plan to travel in the future. In the meantime, who am I?

I'm someone who was born in Nigeria and currently live in Ireland. It's been my home for a long while.



# RAG

Katie recommends art as therapy; writing, drawing, painting, making music & doing absolutely anything creative. Art is one of the most rewarding and fun ways I've found to deal with my emotions, problems and thoughts. Sometimes it helps you express something painful in a positive way. Sometimes it's just really fun. Forget, "I can't, I'm not good at that, I don't know how." Just do it. Ask people to teach you how they do it, get a group together to play music or collaborate with friends on a piece. Creativity is one of life's greatest pleasures and healers.

KT recommends:

Taking yourself out of your comfort zone  
Fireside naked dancing  
Blue tincture bottles especially if provided by strangers  
Solo Travel  
Bungee Jumps  
Riding in the back of pickup trucks  
Roof riding in India  
Buying novelty shaped dildos especially of the ice cream variety!!  
Dancing in the rain

Marianne recommends asking your friends/family when you need help. It's easy to feel overwhelmed by things in life; workloads, responsibilities, plans or whatever it is you need to get done. You can get bogged down and feel like things will never get done, which makes it even harder to do anything.

Making lists and crossing things off as you do them is a great booster but don't be afraid to ask for help. It can come as a surprise when you do ask, how many amazing people are willing to lend a hand. Big things and small things all add up, whether its making you dinner, painting your walls, helping you move house or just hanging out when you need a chat. If you don't ask for help people don't know you need it so I recommend putting your fears to one side and asking!

Leah recommends Women's Museum of Ireland: founded in 2012 to promote the recognition of Irish women both at home and abroad and to write them back in to the history books.  
<http://www.womensmuseumofireland.ie/>

Angela recommends quitting. Sometimes it's ok to decide you aren't going to accomplish a certain goal you'd set out for yourself. It doesn't mean you're a failure! When you decide to stop working towards one thing that just isn't working out, it leaves room to do the thing that you think will be better for you in the long run.

Similarly, gratitude with what you have, where you are, and who you're with is also highly recommended. So many people are trying to do more, make more, accomplish more, break through that ceiling, be the best, break personal records, and excel at everything they do. But sometimes it's nice to say aw fuck it, I think I'll sleep in while the rest of the birds get up early. Sometimes the biggest worm is a giant pain in the ass.

# RECOMMENDS

Abi recommends Ludovico Einaudi's - Nuvole Bianche. Listen to that and your brain will melt in pleasure.

Avoiding personality labels which you then take to heart and live by. For example, being a self-proclaimed shy introvert can mean not trying to get to know new people, thinking it's just who you are. Instead I'm spending this year pushing past all that, talking in big groups, signing up for things that mean I have to step out of my shell etc. etc.

For those hard decisions with only fear holding you back, just close your eyes AND DO IT. Mind you this has come back to bite me in the arse many times, a few texts I'd like to take back, ha. But I can only smile (or cringe) and think at least I did it.

Sheila: Murphy's Witches Brew, known to cure all things congested and snotty--- take a regular hot whiskey--- get a glass throw in some whiskey. My expert opinion is the more whiskey the better, take a slice of lemon or two with say sixish cloves piercing the lemon rind. Throw them in the glass too with some honey. Pour some hot water in on top, not boiling though otherwise you'll evaporate the whiskey. Here is where the fun begins get a Disprin and lash it in along with a Berocca or some other fizzy vitamin C tablet. Poof! Let the hissing and bubbling begin. No illness can actually survive this brew. FACT.

Yemzi recommends having a pink dildo in the shape of a popsicle.

Therapy; it's good to bitch to a professional stranger for only a fiver an hour (the F2 center opposite the Coombe Women's Hospital has a therapy service where people can pay €5 for a session).

Sinead recommends learning an instrument! I started fiddle and whistle this year and its beginning to pay off. There is nothing more satisfying than accomplishing something you didn't think you'd be capable of.

Leticia recommends the story of the 13 roses of Spain: The 5th August of 1939 in Madrid a group of thirteen young women, seven of whom were under age (in Francoist Spain the age of majority was 21), who were executed by Franco dictatorship just after the conclusion of the Spanish Civil War. Their only crime was to be members of the Communist and Socialist Youth.

During their detention in the Ventas prison they were repeatedly tortured and humiliated, and conditions in the prison were considered inhumane and overcrowded. They were executed against the wall of the East Cemetery in Madrid. Julia Conessa, one of the executed wrote a letter saying "Let there be no erasing my name from history".

The thirteen victims' names were: Carmen Barrero Aguado (24 years), Martina Barroso García (22 years), Blanca Brissac Vázquez (29 years), Pilar Bueno Ibáñez (27 years), Julia Conesa Conesa (19 years), Adelina García Casillas (19 years), Elena Gil Olaya (20 years), Virtudes González García (18 years), Ana López Gallego (21 years), Joaquina López Laffite (23 years), Dionisia Manzanero Salas (20 years), Victoria Muñoz García (19 years), and Luisa Rodríguez de la Fuente (18 years).